

THE SHOW

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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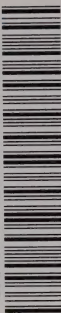
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Dr. Salsworth

THE SHOW

THE WORKS OF
JOHN GALSWORTHY

NOVELS

VILLA RUBEIN: AND OTHER STORIES
THE ISLAND PHARISEES
THE MAN OF PROPERTY
THE COUNTRY HOUSE
FRATERNITY
THE PATRICIAN
THE DARK FLOWER
THE FREELANDS
BEYOND
FIVE TALES
SAINTS' PROGRESS
IN CHANCERY
TO LET
THE FORSYTE SAGA
THE WHITE MONKEY

—
CARAVAN

STORIES AND STUDIES

A COMMENTARY
A MOTLEY
THE INN OF TRANQUILLITY
THE LITTLE MAN
A SHEAF
ANOTHER SHEAF
TATTERDEMATION
CAPTURES

—
POEMS

MOODS, SONGS AND DOGGERELS

—
MEMORIES (ILLUSTRATED)
AWAKENING (ILLUSTRATED)

—
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STRIFE
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THE LITTLE DREAM
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THE PIGEON
THE MOB
FOURTH SERIES: A BIT O' LOVE
FOUNDATIONS
THE SKIN GAME
FIFTH SERIES: A FAMILY MAN
LOYALTIES
WINDOWS
SIX SHORT PLAYS: THE FIRST AND THE LAST
THE LITTLE MAN
HALL-MARKED
DEFEAT
THE SUN
PUNCH AND GO
THE FOREST
OLD ENGLISH

THE SHOW

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

DUCKWORTH

3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

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UPB

CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

ANNE MORECOMBE

A MAID

A DETECTIVE

A DIVISIONAL SURGEON

A CONSTABLE

A COOK

DAISY ODIHAM

A REPORTER

COLONEL ROLAND

GEOFFREY DARREL

AN EDITOR

A SECRETARY

A NEWS EDITOR

LADY MORECOMBE

ODIHAM

A CORONER'S CLERK

A CONSTABLE

LIEUTENANT OSWALD, R.N.

SOME PERSONS

THE FOREMAN AND SEVEN OTHER JURYMEN

THE SHOW

PRODUCED AT THE ST MARTIN'S THEATRE
JULY 1ST 1925

CAST

ANNE MORECOMBE	.	By Miss Molly Kerr.
A MAID	.	„ Miss Eileen Sharp.
A DETECTIVE	.	„ Mr Leslie Banks.
A DIVISIONAL SURGEON	.	„ Mr Marcus Barron.
A CONSTABLE (ACT I)	.	„ Mr Bryan Powley.
A COOK	.	„ Miss Una O'Connor.
DAISY ODIHAM	.	„ Miss Hermione Baddeley.
A REPORTER	.	„ Mr Clifford Mollison.
COLONEL ROLAND	.	„ Mr Felix Aylmer.
GEOFFREY DARREL	.	„ Mr Ian Hunter.
AN EDITOR	.	„ Mr Aubrey Mather.
A SECRETARY	.	„ Miss Ethne Honan.
A NEWS EDITOR	.	„ Mr Eliot Makeham.
LADY MORECOMBE	.	„ Miss Haidee Wright.
MR ODIHAM	.	„ Mr Ben Field.
A CORONER'S CLERK	.	„ Mr Lawrence Baskcomb.
A LADY	.	„ Miss Mary Forbes.
AN OFFICER OF THE AIR		
MINISTRY	.	„ Mr Eliot Makeham.
THREE LADIES	.	„ Mesdames Una O'Connor, Vane, and Valerie Taylor.
A CONSTABLE (ACT III).	.	„ Mr Aubrey Mather.
LIEUT. OSWALD, R.N.	.	„ Mr Robert Harris.
FOREMAN OF THE JURY	.	„ Mr Bryan Powley.
THE CORONER'S JURY	.	„ Messrs Robert Drysdale, A. G. Poulton, Marcus Barron, Carleton Hobbs, Ivor Barnard, Ian O. Will, and Malcolm Rignold.
PRESS ASSOCIATION RE-		
PORTER	.	„ Mr Vere Bennett.

Produced by BASIL DEAN.

SCENES

ACT I.

Study in the MORECOMBES' House, Kensington. A March morning.

ACT II.

SCENE I. An EDITOR'S Room, the following morning.

SCENE II. The MORECOMBES' Study, a little later.

ACT III.

Waiting-room at a CORONER'S Court, again the following morning.

TIME—*The Present.*

ACT I



ACT I

It is ten o'clock on a March morning. The study of a house in Kensington is empty and curtained, but narrow streaks of daylight come in between the window-curtains of the two windows, Back. A low-backed armchair is drawn up to the fireplace, Right. There is a door below the fireplace, and another opposite to it, Left. A bureau stands over on the left. On it is a telephone. On a stool by the armchair is a tray with a decanter of brandy, a syphon, and a glass. The room is tastefully enough appparelled, and there is a book-case between the windows. A small model of a flying-machine stands on the top of it.

The door on the right is opened, and ANNE MORECOMBE comes in ; about twenty-five years old, dark, very pale, with an excellent figure and a reticent beauty. She turns up the light, stands gazing at the armchair, shudders, passes swiftly across the room, locks the door, Left, and takes up the receiver of the telephone.

ANNE. Chelsea 0012. . . . Is that—is that you, Geof?—Anne speaking. [*Her voice is low, quick and tense*] An awful thing's happened. Colin has shot

himself. . . . Yes . . . through the heart . . . last night. . . . When I got in from you, I found him here in the study in—his—armchair—dead. The doctor said about two hours. . . . Yes, the police came. . . . No, no doubt—no. The pistol was still in his hand—his own. . . . Us. . . . No, no! He didn't know—I'm sure not. And if he had, he wouldn't have cared. You know he wouldn't. . . . No! I can't conceive—I don't know anything of his affairs—no more than he knew of mine——

She hears a sound, swiftly replaces the receiver, swiftly unlocks the door, and re-crosses to the door, Right, just as the door Left is opened and a MAID enters, saying :

MAID. This is the room, Sir.

TWO MEN *enter. One is a Detective in plain clothes with a valise, the other a Divisional Surgeon of Police.*

DETECTIVE. Mrs Morecombe?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. I'm Detective-Inspector Flayne from Scotland Yard. The Superintendent sent me round. The Divisional Surgeon, Ma'am. He was away last night. I'd like him to see the body before it's removed.

ANNE. This way.

DETECTIVE. One moment. This is the chair? Nothing's been touched since the police were here last night?

ANNE. No. Not since they took him upstairs.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to a note, sitting down in the*

chair, head forward, right hand on lap] Is that right, Ma'am ?

ANNE. [*In a whisper*] Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Touching his own chest*] The clothes were undone here, I believe ?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Nodding to the surgeon, and rising*] The Superintendent tells me they went carefully through everything in this room last night. I have the Major's papers here. [*Lifts the valise*] Is there anything upstairs, Ma'am, I ought to have ?

ANNE. I don't think so. He kept everything here.

DETECTIVE. We'll just go up, if you'll kindly take us. Excuse me, you were down here to—— ?

ANNE. I was telephoning.

DETECTIVE. I see. If you'll take the doctor up, I'll come in a minute.

ANNE goes out, followed by the SURGEON, who has eyed her keenly.

The DETECTIVE draws the curtains of one window fully back, and looks out, then round the room. The telephone bell rings. He takes up the receiver and listens.

DETECTIVE. Who's speaking ? [*There is instant cessation as if he had been cut off*] Um ! Wrong number, or was mine the wrong voice ? [*He replaces the receiver ; stands a moment considering, then goes to the door, Left, and opens it*] Simpson ?

A CONSTABLE in uniform appears. You were on duty last night, this beat ?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. You didn't hear this shot ? [*Referring to his notes*] The doctor puts his death at about nine, I see.

CONSTABLE. No, Sir, I didn't.

DETECTIVE. See anybody come out of this house ?

CONSTABLE. No, Sir. I saw the lady come in.

DETECTIVE. What time ?

CONSTABLE. Half-past ten, Sir, I should say.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to his notes*] Alone ?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How did you come to notice her ?

CONSTABLE. I know her pretty well. She parted from a gentleman half-way up the street, round the corner.

DETECTIVE. Oh ! Do you know him ?

CONSTABLE. No, Sir, I don't know him ; but it's not the first time, by many.

DETECTIVE. Then you'd know him if you saw him ? [*Receiving a nod*] What's he like ?

CONSTABLE. Tallish young man with a soft 'at.

DETECTIVE, *after a moment's reflection, goes to the telephone and looks at the number on it.*

DETECTIVE. [*Taking up receiver*] Exchange. This house has just been rung up and the call was cut off somehow. . . . Oh ! They're still waiting—just put me back. . . . Hallo ! What number is that ? . . . Chelsea 0012. Thank you ! [*He replaces the receiver and jots the number down. To the CONSTABLE*] Take my card, and this number, find out to what name and address it belongs, and bring it back to me at once. Send that maid in here.

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

He goes out.

The DETECTIVE crosses the room, takes up the glass by its base and examines the rim for finger-marks. The MAID comes in.

MAID. Yes, Sir ?

DETECTIVE. Ah ! you. Name ?

MAID. Ellen Frost.

DETECTIVE. No one's touched this, of course ?

MAID. Oh, no !

DETECTIVE. When did Major Morecombe come in last night ?

MAID. About eight, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How d'you know ?

MAID. I saw him coming from the gate. He called down that he'd had dinner.

DETECTIVE. Oh ! What sort of voice ?

MAID. Just his usual, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you bring him this brandy ?

MAID. Yes. He rang for it about half-past eight. He was finishing a letter—he gave it to me to post at once.

DETECTIVE. A letter ? Who to ?

MAID. I didn't notice, Sir. I just went out with it and dropped it in the box, and brought up the brandy. Then he was sitting in that chair.

DETECTIVE. How did he look ?

MAID. Very quiet-like—had his head on his hand—like this. [*Places her hand to her forehead.*]

DETECTIVE. Said nothing ?

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How much brandy should you say he drank ?

MAID. [*Scrutinising decanter*] A good deal, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Half a tumbler ?

MAID. About that, I should think.

DETECTIVE. [*Taking a revolver from the valise*] Do you know this ?

MAID. [*Winning*] Yes, I think so. He used to keep it in the bureau drawer.

DETECTIVE. You didn't see it when you brought the brandy up ?

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you see him again alive ?

MAID. [*Upset*] No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you hear the shot ?

MAID. Well, Sir, I did seem to hear a sound when the gramophone was singing " Butter me 'eart, Charlie." I don't know if you know it, it's rather a loud song.

DETECTIVE. Where were you ?

MAID. In the kitchen—[*Pointing Stage Left*]—that's in the basement, below the drawing-room. It was just before our supper.

DETECTIVE. What time ?

MAID. About nine it would be.

DETECTIVE. But what you heard didn't bring you up ?

MAID. Well, I didn't rightly think it was in the house at all like.

DETECTIVE. How long have you been here ?

MAID. Ever since they were married and come to this house, Sir. Four years now.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to his notes*] They didn't sleep in the same room, I see.

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How long's that been going on ?

MAID. It must be—a year, or fifteen months, about, that the Major's been on the top floor.

DETECTIVE. They weren't on terms, then ? [*The MAID hesitates*] Better be quite frank.

MAID. There was never any words, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Come ! Were they living together ? You know what I mean.

MAID. No, Sir. they weren't ; at least as far as I know.

DETECTIVE. And hadn't been, for a long time ?

MAID. No.

DETECTIVE. They went out separately a good deal ?

MAID. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Mrs Morecombe was out last night ?

MAID. Yes ; I let her in at half-past ten.

DETECTIVE. I see. The Major a violent man ?

MAID. Oh ! no, Sir. Very depressed at times.

DETECTIVE. How d'you mean ?

MAID. I hardly know. He seemed to come to an end, like.

DETECTIVE. Hold his head in his hands—that sort of thing ?

MAID. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Distinguished flying man in the war, I believe ?

MAID. Oh ! yes, Sir. He was a hero.

DETECTIVE. H'm! There were others. Did he get many letters?

MAID. I don't know what you'd call many—six or seven a day, perhaps.

DETECTIVE. Any money pressure that you know of, eh?

MAID. Oh! no, Sir; I'm sure there wasn't.

DETECTIVE. What makes you sure?

MAID. Well, I've never heard money mentioned, 'ardly.

DETECTIVE. Not much talk between them at all, eh?

MAID. No, that's true. Still, you know what money is. If there's money trouble, you're bound to hear of it.

DETECTIVE. That's right. Which did you like best—the Major or Mrs Morecombe?

MAID. Oh! well, Sir, I like them both very much. The poor Major.

DETECTIVE. Ah! Sad thing—very! So you like Mrs Morecombe, too?

MAID. I *do*.

DETECTIVE. What's her family?

MAID. I think there's only her father, old Colonel Roland.

DETECTIVE. Still in the Service?

MAID. Oh! no; he's too old—near seventy, I should think.

DETECTIVE. No brothers?

MAID. No, Sir. She was an only child, I believe.

DETECTIVE. [*Suddenly*] Some reason for the Major and her being estranged. What was it ?

MAID. I couldn't tell you, really.

DETECTIVE. How d'you mean—couldn't ?

MAID. Well, I don't know.

DETECTIVE. Come ! A love affair, eh ?

MAID. [*Flustered*] Really, I can't tell you—I've never seen anything.

DETECTIVE. Yes, but straws show the way the wind blows.

MAID. [*Suddenly resolute*] I never saw any straws.

DETECTIVE. [*With a sharp look*] I see. Knows, but won't tell.

MAID. [*Flustered again*] No, Sir, really ; and it wasn't my business.

DETECTIVE. It's your business to tell what you know. We've got to find out why this happened ; and you've got to help us. Come along with it ! Here we have two young people who haven't lived together for fifteen months, you say. Well, that means that one or other of them, or both, was friendly with someone else. Now doesn't it ?

MAID. [*Stubbornly*] Not knowing, I can't say.

DETECTIVE. Very well. Who came here calling ? While I go upstairs, sit down and write the names down, and mind you don't leave any out.

MAID. No, Sir.

*He goes out by the door, Right.
She sits down at the bureau : and, sucking a
pencil, writes down name after name, as
they occur to her. The door Left is thrown*

open, and the COOK, an older woman, appears.

COOK. Here's a young woman—I can't keep her out.

DAISY ODIHAM *passes her and comes in : pretty, soft, distracted. The MAID has started up, the COOK hangs, as it were, in the doorway.*

DAISY. [*Quite abandoned to emotion—not a very educated voice*] It's not true—it's not true, is it? Say it's not true! Not dead—I mean; not dead?

MAID. [*Affected*] Yes, it's true enough.

DAISY. Oh, God! Oh, God! [*She sinks down in the chair, burying her forehead against the bureau and rocking her body. The COOK crosses to the brandy, pours out some and brings it to her.*]

COOK. Here, drink some of this. Who are you, my dear?

[*The GIRL, after repulsing it, drinks.*]

DAISY. [*Throwing up her head*] What's it matter who I am? I'm nobody—Oh, God! [*Suddenly*] Didn't he leave a word for me? Not a word? Nothing?

MAID. I don't know; I'll ask them if you'll tell me your name.

DAISY. Oh! no; what does it matter—if he's dead? Leave me alone. I'm going.

COOK. You're not going to do anything rash?

DAISY. [*Still wild*] Rash? I couldn't see him, could I?

MAID. Mrs Morecombe's up there, with the police.

DAISY. Oh! I'm going—I'm going! [*Suddenly calmer—almost hard*] It's all right—thank you.

She puts aside the Cook's hand and walks out, with the back of her hand over her face; the MAIDS staring after her.

COOK. Poor thing! [*Coming in a little*] I say—d'you think she's the skeleton in the cupboard?

MAID. [*Still much upset*] And they worrying me with their questions! What am I to say to them now?

COOK. That girl ought to be follered. She might throw herself in the river.

Suddenly they see that a YOUNG MAN is standing in the doorway; a nice-looking young newspaper reporter.

REPORTER. It's all right. She is being followed. Don't be alarmed. She left the front door open, so I came in to tell you that my friend won't lose sight of her. [*Looking at their hostile faces*] I'm afraid I'm giving you trouble. [*He goes close to the MAID and tries to place a note in her hand*] So sorry!

MAID. [*Rejecting the note*] No; I don't know who you are or what business you've got here.

REPORTER. [*With an engaging smile*] Oh! of course, if you feel like that. But it's quite all right. I'm from *The Evening Sun*.

COOK. Oh! That's the one that's "Bright and Early"—ain't it? What does it want here?

REPORTER. Well, you can imagine—this is tremendously interesting to the public. Major More-

combe was a real war hero; everybody remembers that flight of his into Germany. So this is the room? That the chair? [*He crosses*] No blood, I see. [*He is swiftly touring the room.*]

MAID. Excuse me, I think I'll tell the Inspector you're here, and you can ask him any questions you want. [*To Cook, sotto voce*] Watch it!

She goes out, Right.

REPORTER. [*To Cook*] I say, before they come—you know all the ins and outs. Do tell me your theory?

COOK. [*Drily*] Not me. I don't want none of your questions—this is a private house.

REPORTER. [*Hurt*] It's not idle curiosity. Men like Major Morecombe can't shoot themselves without intriguing the Public.

COOK. Well, I don't hold with the papers. If I put my head under the gas, I can do very well without any fuss.

REPORTER. But you'd get it.

COOK. Well, I'm not goin' to oblige, yet, nor 'elp you make a show of the poor Major neither. Let him rest in peace.

REPORTER. Unfortunately, it's my job not to.

COOK. Then I'd get another if I was you.

REPORTER. Easily said, I'm afraid.

He stands dignified and still as the DETECTIVE enters. The COOK, who is close to the door, Left, lingers.

REPORTER. [*Handing a card to the DETECTIVE*] Can you give me any information?

DETECTIVE. None at present. There'll be an inquest.

REPORTER. Can I say anything ?

DETECTIVE. [*With a faint smile*] You may say "the police have the matter in hand."

The CONSTABLE enters, and goes up to the
DETECTIVE.

CONSTABLE. Name and address of that number, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Thank you.

The REPORTER has pricked his ears.

REPORTER. Any development, Inspector ?

DETECTIVE. No ; and not likely to be, so long as you take up my time.

REPORTER. Sorry, Inspector. Then I'll say good-bye for the present.

DETECTIVE. I should.

COOK. Shall I show him out ? [*The DETECTIVE nods.*]

REPORTER. [*With a smile*] Coldly received. Good morning.

He goes out, Left, followed by the COOK.

DETECTIVE. Confound these fellers—like flies, the way they buzz round a carcass. [*Consulting the bit of paper given him*] You'll come with me and identify this gentleman, Simpson.

CONSTABLE. Very good, Sir.

He goes out at a nod from the DETECTIVE.
The DETECTIVE goes over to the bureau and takes up the list of names the MAID has written down. He compares it with the

name given him by the CONSTABLE, and rings the bell. The MAID enters.

DETECTIVE. These all you can think of ?

MAID. No, Sir. I was interrupted. There might be a few others.

DETECTIVE. [*With a sharp look, showing her the paper given him by the CONSTABLE*] Doesn't that gentleman come here ?

MAID. [*Disconcerted*] He—he has been, Sir ; but not for a long time now.

DETECTIVE. Friend of Mrs Morecombe. Come—the truth !

MAID. I—I think so, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Friend of the Major's, too ? [*The MAID hesitates*] You needn't answer, that's quite enough. There was a row over him — some time back ?

MAID. No, Sir—at least, I never——

DETECTIVE. How do you account for his ceasing to come, then ?

MAID. I'm sure I don't know ; perhaps he's got other things to do.

DETECTIVE. How long since he came ?

MAID. About a year, I think.

DETECTIVE. Exactly ; and the Major went upstairs fifteen months ago. Now, about that letter you posted. You *can't* remember who it was to ?

MAID. No, Sir ; I never read the address.

DETECTIVE. Sure ? There's nothing to be ashamed of.

MAID. I'm not ashamed, because I didn't read it.

DETECTIVE. Well now—keep my questions to yourself—see ?

MAID. [*With quivering lips*] Y-yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. [*As the SURGEON and ANNE come in*] You can go now.

The MAID goes, Left.

SURGEON. I must be going on, Inspector. The barrel was carefully adjusted and resting against the bare skin; death instantaneous. Quite satisfied with Dr Mackay's report; nothing to indicate he's got the time wrong. So far as one can judge as yet, and from what this lady says, he was quite a healthy subject. Good day, Madam.

DETECTIVE. The inquest will be the day after to-morrow, Sir. I'll be taking [*Lowering his voice*] the body round to the mortuary before lunch.

SURGEON. Quite. Good morning.

He goes out, Left.

DETECTIVE. Sit down, Madam—you must be worn out. I just want to ask you a question or two. [*ANNE remains standing*] Now, can you tell me why this happened ?

ANNE [*With a quick little negative movement*] No, I can't. I can't.

DETECTIVE. Both the doctors seem agreed there was no disease. What do you say to that ?

ANNE. Oh ! None, I'm sure.

DETECTIVE. And no money troubles ?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Comfortably off, eh ?

ANNE. Yes, both of us.

DETECTIVE. Now, Ma'am — we have to know everything—Why were you and the Major on distant terms ?

ANNE. We weren't on bad terms at all.

DETECTIVE. Were you husband and wife ?

ANNE. Not in one sense.

DETECTIVE. Excuse me, there must have been some reason for that.

ANNE. Only that we agreed not to be, some time ago.

DETECTIVE. Did that suggestion emanate from you or from your husband ?

ANNE. From—from him first.

DETECTIVE. Oh ! from him ! And you didn't object ?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Now you see, the question is : Why did the Major take his life ? The Coroner'll want to know how to direct the Jury. Was it insanity, or was there a good reason ?

ANNE. What does it matter ? Nothing will bring him back.

DETECTIVE. Well, that's a way of looking at it, but it's not customary. A violent death like this has to be gone into. When exactly did you agree to go your own ways ?

ANNE. The Christmas before last.

DETECTIVE. Fifteen months. And you won't give me a reason ?

ANNE. You must excuse me.

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] Very well, Ma'am. It would

be better for you to be frank, but please yourself. Am I to take it that you know of nothing that should make your husband take his life ?

ANNE. No—unless——

DETECTIVE. [*Intrigued*] Yes ?

ANNE. Unless it was in a fit of black depression. He was very moody.

DETECTIVE. [*Disappointed*] Oh ! Come ! Had he ever threatened to ?

ANNE. Not to me.

DETECTIVE. It really is a pity, Ma'am, that you can't give me a better reason. It simply means we've got to look for one.

ANNE. I don't know anything about my husband's private affairs.

DETECTIVE. But you know your own, Ma'am.

ANNE. [*After a pause*] What do you mean ?

DETECTIVE. Most of us have them.

ANNE. It sounded insulting.

DETECTIVE. [*A little harder*] You came in at ten-thirty, I believe, last night ?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. What time had you gone out ?

ANNE. At six o'clock.

DETECTIVE. And between those hours ?

ANNE. [*After a pause*] No, Inspector, I object to being asked questions that have no bearing on this. [*She points to the armchair.*]

DETECTIVE. Madam, reservations in a case of this sort have the worst construction placed on them ; and rightly.

ANNE. I can't help that.

DETECTIVE. [*Looking at her with a sort of admiration*] Was your husband in last evening when you went out ?

ANNE. No. He went out just before me.

DETECTIVE. Perhaps you can tell me at least if he knew where you were going ?

ANNE. He didn't.

DETECTIVE. How can you tell that ?

ANNE. I'm sure.

DETECTIVE. Would he have minded if he had known ?

ANNE. I—I don't think so.

DETECTIVE. I'm suggesting, you know, that he did happen to know, and that this [*Pointing to the chair*] was the result.

ANNE. No—oh ! no.

DETECTIVE. Well, Ma'am, you're making it all very mysterious. We shall have to know where you were last night.

ANNE. [*Twisting her hands*] I tell you that where I was has no bearing on this. If you persist, it won't help you.

DETECTIVE. I should consult your father, if I were you, Ma'am, and follow his advice. I'll be seeing you again before long. [*He looks at the bit of paper given him by the CONSTABLE, encloses it in his notebook, snaps that to, and goes towards the door, Left*] For the present, Madam.

He goes out.

ANNE, left alone, twists her hands, clasps them

on her breast, and looks restlessly about her. She springs towards the telephone, but stops and shakes her head. Then she rings the bell. The MAID enters.

ANNE. Has that man gone, Ellen ?

MAID. Yes, Ma'am. [*Looking at her*] They don't seem to have an idea of privacy. [*After a glance*] He wanted to know who comes here. I had to write down all I could think of—— [*A little pause, and ANNE makes a movement with her hands*] in the last six months.

ANNE. [*Relieved*] Oh ! yes ; of course.

MAID. [*About to go, and turning*] Please, while you was upstairs—there was a—a young man too—from the Press.

A bell rings.

The front door, Ma'am. You won't wish to see people, I suppose.

ANNE. Only my father—I'm expecting him.

The MAID goes out and returns immediately.

MAID. It is Colonel Roland, Ma'am.

COLONEL ROLAND *follows her in and the MAID goes out. He is tall, grey, slightly bowed, Irish by birth, with a look as of a kindly Bengal tiger in his highly-coloured face. He goes straight up to his daughter and puts his hands on her shoulders.*

COL. ROLAND. My poor girl ! This is a dreadful thing.

ANNE. [*Dully*] Yes, Dad.

COL. ROLAND. Why, in the name of the Saints—— ?

ANNE. I don't know.

COL. ROLAND. Surely, my child——

ANNE. I don't, Dad.

COL. ROLAND. To take his own life—with his record ! [*He looks at her searchingly ; puzzled.*]

ANNE. [*After a little pause*] I've never bothered you, Dad, with our affairs, but Colin and I had been strangers for a long time.

COL. ROLAND. Strangers ? How's that, Anne ?

ANNE. The whole thing was a mistake, I'm afraid.

COL. ROLAND. [*Disturbed*] Well, well, I won't ask you any questions now. It hasn't been your fault, I know.

ANNE. Nor his.

COL. ROLAND. I'm glad to hear that ; I liked Colin—I liked um. He was a fine fellow—for a flyin' man. Have the police been ?

ANNE. Yes ; and the Press.

COL. ROLAND. Confound them—they'll make a show of it, if they can. What do the police say ?

ANNE. Only that they have to know everything for the inquest. They've taken all his papers.

COL. ROLAND. What's in them, Anne ?

ANNE. I tell you, Dad, I know no more of Colin than he knew of me.

COL. ROLAND. Of you ? What should there be to know of you, my child ?

ANNE. [*Lowering her head—suddenly*] Father, I don't know what's coming of this. But you must believe there was an absolute compact between us to go our own ways. If it hadn't been for you, we

might have thought of a divorce ; but I knew you'd hate it so.

COL. ROLAND. Divorce ! Indeed, I would ! Well, the poor fellow's gone ! In his prime ! Well—well !

The MAID enters.

MAID. Excuse me, Ma'am. This young man again—from the newspaper.

COL. ROLAND. Tell um to go to —— ! No. I'll tell um myself. [*He follows the MAID to the door, where he meets the REPORTER coming in*] Now then, Sir, what is it you want ?

REPORTER. [*To ANNE*] Mrs Morecombe ?

COL. ROLAND. Will you be good enough to understand that my daughter has just suffered a bereavement ? This sort of intrusion is unwelcome.

REPORTER. Colonel Roland, I believe ? I'm extremely sorry, Sir. It's very distasteful to me, too. But the Public——

COL. ROLAND. Damn the Public !

ANNE. What is it you want to know ?

REPORTER. If you *could* tell me anything—about the Major's health, for instance ; or whether his new aeroplane design had been refused. He was such a distinguished man. Any news——

ANNE. My husband's health was good ; and I don't think he had even offered any design lately.

REPORTER. [*Nervously*] Well, thank you very much. Of course, that adds to the mystery, doesn't it ?

COL. ROLAND. I'd be glad if you'd tell your

paper, Sir, to keep its nose out of people's private affairs.

REPORTER. [*Pleasantly*] When you say private, you forget the inquest, don't you?

COL. ROLAND. I presume the inquest will be a decent quiet affair.

REPORTER. Oh! do you, Sir? I wonder!

ANNE. Are you married?

REPORTER. Yes.

ANNE. If she committed suicide, would you like persons coming to ask you about her?

REPORTER. Oh! But surely—a paper isn't an ordinary——

COL. ROLAND. No! It's a devilish sight worse.

REPORTER. [*Ruefully*] Well, Sir, really, we *have* to take notice when things like this happen. What do you suppose we're for?

COL. ROLAND. Good day to you.

The REPORTER hesitates a moment, then, with a murmured "Good morning—so sorry!" goes out.

ANNE. [*With a sudden breakdown of her composure, burying her face against her father's chest*] Oh! Dad—it's horrible!

COL. ROLAND. There, there, my child! Don't think about it! Go and lie down. You must be half dead. I'll come back after lunch.

ANNE. Yes, I *will* lie down. Good-bye, Dad!

COL. ROLAND. [*Kissing her forehead*] Good-bye, my dear; bless you! Get a good sleep.

He goes out.

ANNE. [*Stands a moment, considering, then goes to the telephone*] Give me Chelsea 0012. . . . [*A pause*] Haven't you got that number? [*Pause*] Ring them again, please. . . . [*Pause*] No answer?

MAID. [*Entering*] You said you wouldn't see anyone, Ma'am. But——

ANNE. Who is it?

MAID. Mr Darrel, Ma'am.

ANNE. Oh! [*Replacing the receiver, she stares hard at the MAID, who exhibits signs of confusion*] I'll see him.

She clasps her hands. The MAID goes out, and returns ushering in GEOFFREY DARREL, a tall young man, very constrained, who the moment she has gone, darts forward to ANNE and kisses her.

DARREL. My darling!

ANNE. Geof! How could you come here? You mustn't. I'd just rung you up again. We simply can't see each other till this is all over.

DARREL. It's awful for you—this! I had to come. I couldn't stick it.

ANNE. Did you meet my father going away?

DARREL. No—nobody.

ANNE. You mustn't stay. The Police—the Press. They want to find his motive. They'll drag up everything they can for the inquest.

DARREL. They don't know about us?

ANNE. They suspect *something*. I'm terrified, for Father's sake.

DARREL. My child, it's Nemesis. We ought to have gone off long ago.

ANNE. Oh! Geof, I know; I was wrong—I was wrong. Why didn't I face telling Father? But he's so old-fashioned, and a Catholic never——

DARREL. Thank Heaven you're free now!

ANNE. Last night— [*Shuddering and pointing to the chair*] I'd seen him at tea-time—he seemed just as usual. And yet, he must have known then what he was going to do. He looked——! Things came back.

DARREL. [*Jealously*] Anne!

ANNE. No, no! Only it seemed so brutal. I was all warm coming from you. And he was so white and cold. The last thing I said to you—and he was dead when I said it. [*Her lips quiver.*]

DARREL. Don't, darling, don't!

ANNE. But *why—why*? It's an utter mystery. If I thought it was because of us—but I'm sure—I'm sure it wasn't. I'm sure he never knew. Besides, I feel certain he had someone. Geof, you mustn't stay! Quick! Think! What's best?

DARREL. Abroad. Couldn't we go now? *Must* you be at the inquest?

ANNE. Of course! I found him. Geof, suppose it comes out about us?

DARREL. [*Suddenly—low*] Listen! The bell!

ANNE. [*Breathless*] Oh! [*She moves to the door.*]

The MAID comes in and stands staring at

DARREL.

MAID. [*Low*] It's the Detective again, Ma'am.

ANNE. I can't see anyone just now.

MAID. Shall I say you're asleep, Ma'am ? I don't think anything else'd stop him.

ANNE. Ask him to come again at twelve.

*But as the MAID opens the door to go, the
DETECTIVE enters, and shuts the door on
her.*

DETECTIVE. Excuse me, Madam. Mr Geoffrey Darrel, I believe ?

DARREL. [*Startled*] Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Showing DARREL his card*] I've been round to your rooms, Sir. About this death of Major Morecombe—if you'll kindly answer a question or two.

DARREL. I ?

DETECTIVE. Where did you spend last evening ?

DARREL. At home. Why ?

DETECTIVE. Didn't go out ?

DARREL. I went out soon after ten for a bit.

DETECTIVE. Exactly ! You parted from Mrs Morecombe close here about ten-twenty ?

DARREL. What ? How do you mean ?

DETECTIVE. Now, Sir, don't prevaricate, please. The Constable on this beat saw you taking leave of her at that time. Was she with you at your rooms ?

DARREL. What right have you to ask these questions ?

DETECTIVE. I happen to be in charge of this case, Sir.

DARREL. I've nothing on earth to do with this suicide, and I can't answer you.

DETECTIVE. It's known to us that you've often left this lady close to her house at night. You were with her last evening, and she telephoned to you this morning. It's further known that you used to be a caller here, and ceased to be a year ago. Now, Sir, you received a letter from Major Morecombe this morning. . . .

DARREL. I did not.

DETECTIVE. Excuse me !

DARREL. I tell you I did *not*.

DETECTIVE. He wrote and posted one just before he committed suicide, and we want it.

DARREL. I give you my word of honour I received no such letter.

DETECTIVE. If you did not receive this letter, it will go far to show that your friendship with Mrs Morecombe was not the cause of the Major's suicide. Do you mind emptying your pockets ? Now, Sir, sensibly. If you haven't got it, it can't do you any harm.

DARREL *empties his pockets.* The DETECTIVE
glances at the letters.

As a matter of form, Sir. [*He runs his hands skilfully over DARREL*] Very good ! I took the Constable round to your place, and he identified you by a photograph.

DARREL. What ! You broke in ?

DETECTIVE. [*With a smile*] You see, I didn't know when I'd get you, and I've no time to waste.

DARREL. This is an outrage !

DETECTIVE. Well, not exactly, Sir ; no. There's

just one thing I brought away that I'd like you to open for me. [*He goes to the door and calls*] Simpson!

The CONSTABLE appears with a locked japanned box.

DARREL. This is abominable!

DETECTIVE. [*Taking the box—to CONSTABLE*] This is the gentleman?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. That'll do, then!

The CONSTABLE goes out.

DARREL. Give me that box.

DETECTIVE. Yes, Sir; I want you to open it.

DARREL. I shall do nothing of the sort.

DETECTIVE. Then I must force the lock.

DARREL. [*At his wits' end*] Look here, this is a horrible business for everyone. Surely you don't want to make it worse? I've given you my solemn word.

DETECTIVE. A gentleman will always give that, Sir, to save a lady. Kindly unlock it. [*Holds out the box.*]

DARREL. My friendship for Mrs Morecombe has nothing to do with this suicide. Major Morecombe didn't know of it; if he had, he wouldn't have cared—they were quite apart.

DETECTIVE. Exactly; and if you'll excuse me, I think you're the reason of that.

DARREL. I am *not*.

DETECTIVE. Then what is?

DARREL. I don't know.

DETECTIVE. In my opinion, the letter I want will tell us.

DARREL. [*Passionately*] I have had no letter.

DETECTIVE. We shall see that.

DARREL. [*Seizing the box*] Shall we ?

But as he speaks ANNE comes from where she has been standing, motionless.

ANNE. [*Very calmly to the DETECTIVE*] That's enough. You are quite right. We are lovers.

The DETECTIVE makes her a little bow.

But you'll serve no purpose by making that public ; you'll only cause my father great sorrow. Isn't it all painful enough without ?

DETECTIVE. [*Uncomfortable*] That's as may be, Ma'am. But a matter like this has to be cleared up.

ANNE. Why ?

DETECTIVE. The law takes no account of privacy when a thing like this happens.

DARREL. The law ! It's got no guts.

DETECTIVE. Very sensibly said, Sir. Kindly open this box.

DARREL. It contains nothing but private letters from this lady to me.

DETECTIVE. Well, we'll just confirm that.

ANNE. Open it, Geof.

DETECTIVE. That's right, Ma'am ; in view of your admission, there's every chance we shan't need them. They shall be kept under seal, and returned.

DARREL, *taking a key from his watch-chain, opens the little box. The DETECTIVE takes out a packet of letters. From the first he*

takes a dried flower and puts it carefully back into the box. The TWO LOVERS have unconsciously clasped hands, watching the DETECTIVE rapidly turning over letter after letter to see that they are all in the same handwriting.

DETECTIVE. All correct, Sir. You'd like to seal them up yourself, no doubt.

DARREL *has wrenched his hand from ANNE's, and covered his eyes. She goes to the bureau and taking a large envelope hands it to the DETECTIVE, who puts the letters in and closes it.*

DARREL. Why do you take them, if you're not going to use them ?

DETECTIVE. Well, Sir, we shan't use them unless Mrs Morecombe contradicts the statement she made just now. To have them will remove that temptation. You shall have them back, Sir, just as they are, if you'll put your seal on them. [*He lays the envelope on the bureau. DARREL seals it.*]

DARREL. Will you let me attend the inquest instead of her ?

DETECTIVE. [*Placing the envelope in his breast pocket*] Out of the question, Sir. [*Points to the chair*] She found the body.

DARREL. The whole thing's inhuman.

DETECTIVE. Well, Sir, there it is. . . . Off the carpet, and you never know where you'll land. But you can trust me.

DARREL. Will you give me your card, please ?

The DETECTIVE hands him a card, and the little box, empty of all except the flower.

DETECTIVE. You persist in saying you got no letter from Major Morecombe this morning, Sir ?

DARREL. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Well, I hope we shall get hold of it. [*Looking at his face intently*] And I sincerely trust we shan't need——

ANNE moves a step, looking at him.

[*With a gesture of discomfort*] My duty, Ma'am.

He goes out. The door is shut.

The Two LOVERS stand side by side without a word.

DARREL. [*Suddenly*] What could I have done ?

ANNE. [*Taking his hand*] Nothing, Geof. Don't look like that. It's just fatality. I must tell Father now. How horrible for him, how horrible ! He'll never understand !

DARREL. Wait, darling. There's always a chance. This letter——

ANNE. He gave one to Ellen to post, it seems, just before——

DARREL. You say he had someone ?

ANNE. But who ? We never asked each other anything. That was agreed. The letter may have been to his mother, of course.

There is a knock. The door is opened by the

REPORTER.

REPORTER. Could I speak to you again for just one

minute, Mrs Morecombe ? I'm afraid I must seem very intrusive——

ANNE. Yes. [*The REPORTER stands embarrassed, looking from one to the other*] Well ?

REPORTER. It's just this. Did you know that a young woman came to your house this morning, in a state of great distress ?

ANNE. A young—— ! [*She and DARREL exchange a glance*] No.

REPORTER. Perhaps it may throw some light—— [*He has noted their glance, and looks from one to the other*] Luckily I had a friend, who followed her.

ANNE. [*Suddenly*] Are you going to drag another wretched woman into this ?

REPORTER. [*Nonplussed*] Well, you see, she was in such a state.

ANNE. Do you want to make it worse ?

REPORTER. No, indeed ! Only, of course—— Then you *can't* tell me anything about her ?

ANNE. I know nothing of her.

REPORTER. Thank you very much. That simplifies things, anyway. I wanted to be sure. I'm very much obliged to you. Good morning.

ANNE. [*Suddenly*] My husband has a mother, to whom he was a hero.

REPORTER. Oh ! Could you give me her address ?

ANNE. She's in the country. She must be broken-hearted. She adored him. Don't you realise ?

REPORTER. Yes, indeed. It's a terrible drama.

DARREL. [*Grimly*] Perhaps you'd like to ask why I'm here ?

REPORTER. Oh! no, thank you. I can—er—
imagine.

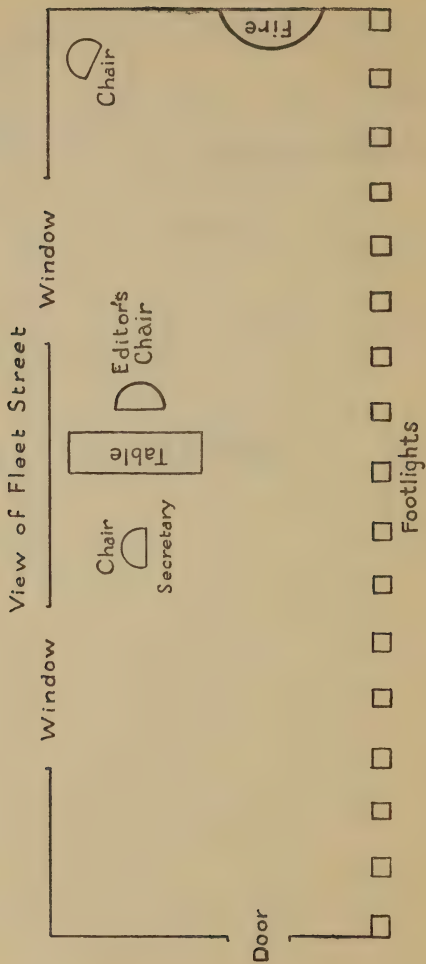
He goes out.

DARREL. My God!

ANNE is standing motionless.

CURTAIN.

ACT II



ACT II

SCENE I

The Editor's room, at the offices of "The Evening Sun," on the following morning. The room, moderately snug, is longish and narrow, the windows at the back have a view of Fleet Street. Right, Forward, there is a door. A large bureau stands between the windows. Left, is a fireplace.

The EDITOR is sitting at the bureau with his back to the fireplace. He is about fifty, short, with an involuted and ironical face and quick eyes. He is dictating to his secretary, a fresh-faced girl.

EDITOR. "The object is good, of course; but in order to strike a note with the public, a much bigger name is required." Umm! it's a pity—the really valuable names are in prison. Whom do you suggest, Miss Price? [*Checking her at the first movement of her lips*] No, no! Not a novelist—the public are fed up with novelists. Isn't there a cleric?

SECRETARY. Well, of course, there's—

EDITOR. Oh! Not him! These humanitarian stunts depend on a touch of novelty. How about a judge. Well—it doesn't press. I want to see the News Editor.

SECRETARY. Yes, Mr Eagles ; he's waiting. [*Goes to the door and says*] Will you come in, Mr Kenting ?

The NEWS EDITOR enters : he is of a brisk, rather sandy type, with a short-clipped moustache, and a pipe in his hand.

EDITOR. Morning, Kenting. [*He takes up a copy of yesterday's issue*] That'll do, Miss Price.

She goes out, with a pile of finished letters.

Look here ! Who passed this paragraph on the Morecombe suicide—about a young woman calling at the house in a state of distress ?

NEWS ED. I did.

EDITOR. I don't like it.

NEWS ED. What's wrong ?

EDITOR. Suggestive.

NEWS ED. *He* can't bring a libel action—poor chap.

EDITOR. No ; but we shall have the police round about it.

NEWS ED. Well, it's all to our credit ; they wouldn't have got hold of it without.

EDITOR. Yes ; but this thing is *sub judice*.

NEWS ED. Not yet.

EDITOR. That's all very well, Kenting, but you can't be too careful. Who was the reporter ?

NEWS ED. Young Forman's on it. He's a very decent chap—there's no name given. I've got to get news. This Morecombe suicide is bound to make a stir. He bombed farther into Germany than any flying man we had.

EDITOR. Exactly ! But this is going to hurt his people.

NEWS ED. Well! Forman says the police are running *Mrs Morecombe's* private life.

EDITOR. Oh! When's the inquest?

NEWS ED. To-morrow.

The SECRETARY enters with a card.

EDITOR. [*After glancing at it, makes a face, and hands it to KENTING*] Here we are, you see.

NEWS ED. [*Reading*] *Lady Morecombe*. Who's that—his mother?

EDITOR. Show her in, Miss Price. This is up to you, Kenting.

They stand at attention. LADY MORECOMBE is a little grey-haired lady in black, wiry and of a Highland type. The contrast between her little figure and the tall form of COLONEL ROLAND, who accompanies her, is striking.

LADY M. Give me that paper, Colonel Roland. [*Taking a newspaper from COLONEL ROLAND's hand*] Are you the editor?

EDITOR. Yes.

LADY M. [*With intense suppressed feeling*] Why do you put this about my son?

EDITOR. We were just discussing that, Lady Morecombe. This is the news editor, Mr Kenting.

LADY M. Is it you who are responsible?

NEWS ED. I passed it. What do you object to, Ma'am? It's a fact.

LADY M. "A young woman in great distress"! It suggests—suggests—! I was in the country when

I had this awful news. I come up ; and this is the first thing I see.

NEWS ED. It's quite vague—no name—might be anyone.

LADY M. Don't you know people better than that ? The worst construction, of course, will be put.

NEWS ED. Very sorry if it hurts you, Lady Morecombe ; but you don't realise, I'm afraid, that an inquest makes everything public. We're merely helping to get at the truth as quickly as possible.

LADY M. The truth ? What is that to you ?

EDITOR. Immense subject, that, Lady Morecombe. The Press is the chief safeguard against injustice of all sorts. Secret enquiries are to no one's interest in the long run.

LADY M. [*With passion*] That is cant. You want to sell your paper. And because of that, my son, who can't defend himself, is to be blackened—his affairs hawked about on the street.

EDITOR. [*With a sort of dignity*] It's hardly as simple as that. We do want to sell our paper, of course. A Press that doesn't pay its way, can't live. But if there's a villain in the piece, it's the Public, Lady Morecombe—not us.

LADY M. Will you contradict this paragraph ?

EDITOR. I appreciate your feelings, but I assure you it would serve no purpose. The inquest will bring out every circumstance, and more, that concerns your son's death.

LADY M. But for your meddling, this would never have been known.

EDITOR. [*Subtly*] You admit it, then ?

LADY M. I admit nothing against my son ; he was a hero.

EDITOR. Quite ! But don't you want to know the reason of his suicide ?

LADY M. It is known to God.

EDITOR. Ah ! I'm afraid He will keep it to Himself. If no one else is to know, the blame may be wrongly assigned. I am told, for instance, that the police believe it to be due to Mrs Morecombe's conduct.

COL. ROLAND. What ?

EDITOR. I beg your pardon.

COL. ROLAND. That lady is my daughter, Sir. Be good enough to explain yourself.

The EDITOR looks at the NEWS EDITOR.

NEWS ED. You'll find that the police are following a clue in that direction.

COL. ROLAND. What devil's gossip's this ? Speak out !

NEWS ED. Entirely in confidence—that is the line they're going on. Our reporter——

COL. ROLAND. Ah ! What d'you mean by sending people to meddle with private affairs ?

NEWS ED. [*Angrily*] That's not the way to——

EDITOR. One moment, Kenting. [*He sounds a bell*] Forman, you said ?

KENTING *nods sullenly.* *The SECRETARY has appeared.*

EDITOR. Miss Price, if Mr Forman's in, ask him to come here.

She goes.

EDITOR. Now, excuse me, all this is very human, but we should be glad of civility. It's often very difficult to decide between private susceptibilities and our duty to the Public.

COL. ROLAND. What concern is it of the Public? What business have you to feed their confounded curiosity? Thank God, there's a law of libel!

NEWS ED. Yes; but it won't lie against the police. *We* haven't said anything about your daughter.

EDITOR. This shows you, Lady Morecombe, how important it is that everything should be known, if the real truth is to come out.

Before LADY MORECOMBE can answer, the
REPORTER enters.

EDITOR. Mr Forman, I understand you have the Morecombe case in hand. Here are Major Morecombe's mother and Mrs Morecombe's father.

REPORTER. Yes, Sir. [*He bows.*]

COL. ROLAND. What have you been saying about my daughter?

REPORTER. [*Uneasy*] Well, Sir, after I saw you, I had a question to put to Mrs Morecombe about the young woman who came there yesterday morning——

LADY M. [*Breaking in*] It's you, then, who are responsible for this calumny on my son?

REPORTER. [*With a glance at KENTING*] Really, I simply carry out my orders.

COL. ROLAND. What did you tell your chief about my daughter?

REPORTER. Merely what I gathered from my own observation. There's nothing about that in the paper.

LADY M. Why did you invent that lie about this woman ?

REPORTER. [*Angry*] Lie ! She was Major Morecombe's mistress, by her own account.

LADY M. [*Mastering herself again*] If she was, what has that to do with his death ?

NEWS ED. That, I take it, will be for the Jury.

LADY M. Will you give me her address, please ?

REPORTER. [*To the EDITOR*] Am I to give it, Sir ?

EDITOR. Yes.

REPORTER. Miss Odiham, 48 Burdells Buildings, Fulham.

LADY M. [*Writing it down*] Are you coming, Colonel Roland ?

COL. ROLAND. Just a moment. [*To EDITOR*] Do I understand, Sir, that your paper will make no further allusion to this death except to report the inquest ?

EDITOR. [*After a moment's pause*] To give you that assurance would be to admit my paper in the wrong, which I am far from doing. I must be guided by events.

LADY M. It's ghoulish—ghoulish !

She turns and goes out.

COL. ROLAND. You had better give me that assurance.

EDITOR. No, Sir. The Press is not to be abused and hectored in this manner.

COL. ROLAND. Very well. I shall go straight to my lawyers.

He follows LADY MORECOMBE *out.*

EDITOR. This'll never do. If they get hold of the girl and spirit her away, we shan't be able to substantiate our paragraph. We must keep the whip hand. Mr Forman, cut off at once and get her away yourself.

REPORTER. If I can, Sir.

He goes out.

EDITOR. What a little tigress! And that old Irish-Indian!

NEWS ED. Peppery devil!

EDITOR. They seem to think one *wants* to hurt their feelings.

The SECRETARY enters.

SECRETARY. Detective-Inspector Flayne, from Scotland Yard, wishes to see you, Mr Eagles.

EDITOR. [*Groans*] What did I tell you, Kenting? Bring him in.

The DETECTIVE enters. He looks from one to the other.

DETECTIVE. I've called about your paragraph on the Morecombe suicide, Sir.

EDITOR. Yes?

DETECTIVE. What's this about a girl?

EDITOR. Well, Inspector, we have some news that you haven't, as yet.

DETECTIVE. Excuse my saying so, but this is entirely a matter for the police. We don't want any interference. If you wish to give me your informa-

tion, you can ; otherwise I'm afraid we shall have to get an attachment for contempt.

EDITOR. I don't think you can. The matter's not yet *sub judice*.

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] We shall see that.

EDITOR. We have our duty to the Public as well as to you, Inspector. This is a mysterious business, and Morecombe was the best-known flying man we had, far and away.

DETECTIVE. Am I to have that young woman's name and address ?

EDITOR. Well, we want to give you every assistance. But I think we're entitled to a little kudos, Inspector.

DETECTIVE. Now, Sir. Hindering the law——

EDITOR. Helping. In return for this information—favoured nation terms in regard to anything you give out to the Press—eh ?

DETECTIVE. All right. That's understood.

EDITOR. Give him the address, Kenting.

NEWS ED. Daisy Odiham, 48 Burdells Buildings, Fulham.

DETECTIVE. [*Entering it in his notebook*] Thank you. Good morning.

He goes out.

NEWS ED. [*Again looking at his watch*] If Forman's smart, all our friends will find the bird flown. What then ?

EDITOR. We'll see. I'm just a little fed up, Kenting. The Press gets all the blame for the natural instincts of mankind. I don't care what

they say, curiosity is the greatest thing in the world ; I'm quite keen myself to know why Morecombe committed suicide. I suppose he *did* ?

NEWS ED. Yes. No improving on that.

EDITOR. [*Following out his own line of thought*] Someone's got to stand up for the man in the street. Why shouldn't he know ? News—so long as it's true. I'm not going to be dictated to by those people. Go ahead as if they didn't exist. Ordinary discretion and decency, of course. We'll produce the girl if the police want her. But it does them no harm to know that we're more sly than they are. That's all now, Kenting. Sent in Miss Price again, will you ?

As the NEWS EDITOR turns to go out, he reseats himself and turns over some papers.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

A little later, the same morning.

The Morecombes's Study, still curtained, with daylight coming through the curtains in narrow streaks.

As the curtain goes up, the MAID enters, turning up the light and showing in MR ODIHAM and his DAUGHTER. The girl is drooping, and seems to have been crying. Her father is a short man of the house-painter type, with all the oddity and reserved judgments of the cockney workman.

MAID. Mrs Morecombe's at lunch. What name shall I tell her ?

ODIHAM. Odiham. [*He pronounces it Oddium*] And make it special, if it's all the same to you.

The MAID goes out. The Two stand disconsolate.

DAISY. [*Suddenly*] Oh ! Daddy, I can't bear to see her !

ODIHAM. Come now, Daisy ; she won't eat you. If they'd done with each other, as you keep tellin' me——

DAISY. Oh ! They had—they had !

ODIHAM. Perk up, then, and let's put the hat on it. It's the only way to stop these noospaper chaps.

[*He takes a folded paper out of his side pocket. ANNE enters.*]

ANNE. Yes? You wanted to see me?

The GIRL gasps.

ODIHAM. That's right, Ma'am. You're keepin' well, I 'ope? [*Smoothing his trousers*] P'r'aps I oughtn't to 'a brought my daughter 'ere, but fact is—when you can't get out of a thing, you've got to face it.

ANNE. [*Looking intently at the GIRL*] I see.

ODIHAM. Did you notice this in yesterday's *Evenin'*, Ma'am?

ANNE. [*Taking the newspaper*] Yes.

ODIHAM. I get it every day with my supper. Of course, when I read it last night, I'd no idea it was my daughter. I just 'appened to show it to 'er, an' that fetched it all out of 'er sudden—about 'er and your 'usband, Ma'am. First I knew of it, an' that's the truth. And of course as to what you know, I can't tell.

ANNE. Nothing.

ODIHAM. Dear, dear! Well, I always say—When you once begin to tell the truth, it don't do to stop sudden. There's no denyin' the liaison, it seems. Of course 'er mother was Irish, an' brought 'er up too strict. And bein' in a restaurant, she's liable to admiration. But I never dreamed of 'er 'avin' a private life, and I can only ask you to look over it.

ANNE. [*Coldly*] There's no need.

ODIHAM. You see, this noospaper 'ints that "the girl in distress," as they call 'er 'ere, is the cause of

the catastrophe. And, of course, she tells me she ain't. Daisy, tell the lady about what you told me about when you saw the Major last.

ANNE. Yes, tell me.

DAISY. [*Choking a little, but mastering her voice*] Oh, Madam, I—I saw him the evening before—he—he—. He took me down to Richmond. Madam, I'm sure I'm not the cause of—of what happened. He was just as nice as ever he could be, and I—I didn't give him any—trouble, ever. We never—never had any words. [*She covers her face; recovering with a brusque movement*] I was too fond of him. I adored him. I wouldn't ever have given him any trouble.

ANNE. [*Quietly*] You came here yesterday morning, didn't you?

DAISY. I was crazy; and as I went away a man followed me. He told me he'd have to tell the police if I didn't give him the truth. I lost my head, and I don't know what I said. And then they go and put this in the paper. There was no call for anything to come out about me. Oh! if I've done him a mischief! I wouldn't have hurt him for the world! [*She masters herself with difficulty.*]

ODIHAM. [*With heat*] Ah! You don't know where to have these noospaper fellers, they're all over it. There's another after 'er now—wants 'er to go away an' 'ide 'erself. I said to him: "What game is this? She's got nothin' to do with this tradeegy." But 'e kept on, till I thought to meself: "I got to stop this, some'ow. The only way is to go to

'eadquarters." I didn't like to bring her 'ere, but I 'ave. And, what's more, I believe 'e's followed us.

ANNE. I'm sure he has.

ODIHAM. He'd better watch it. My girl may 'ave done wrong, but she's a good girl, and I stand by her. From what she says, she ain't accessory to the fact, and if you'd just tell this feller the reason of your 'usband's havin' done what he did, Ma'am—and stop 'em gluin' their noses to the shop winder.

ANNE. I don't know the reason.

ODIHAM. [*Blank*] Aow! "Veiled in mystery." I thought, as the paper said that, you'd be *sure* to know reely. [*Scratching his head*] Well, some'ow it's got to be stopped. 'Er name ain't mentioned yet.

ANNE. My father, and my husband's mother have gone down to the office of this newspaper; but I'm afraid it's too late. The police will have seen this paragraph, and follow it up, I suppose.

ODIHAM. [*With anger*] Call that English! It's a terrible thing for my girl, if they're goin' to make 'er public.

ANNE. It's terrible for us all, Mr——

ODIHAM. Oddium.

ANNE. [*To the GIRL*] Did you get a letter from Major Morecombe this morning?

DAISY. No. And he never said good-bye special when I left him on Sunday. I can't hardly believe he's gone.

ANNE. Can you think of *any* reason?

DAISY. [*Shaking her head*] No! Only sometimes he'd be silent suddenly, and look——

ANNE. Yes.

ODIHAM. Savin' your presence, Ma'am, I don't think a man's the right to leave everybody like this gapin' for news of why ; I don't, reely.

ANNE. It seems he wrote a letter, but to whom we don't know ; it might throw light if we could trace it.

ODIHAM. Ah ! well—it's a warnin' against 'avin' a private life.

The MAID enters.

MAID. That young man from the newspaper wants to see this—gentleman again.

ODIHAM. Ah ! I thought he'd bob up.

ANNE. Do you wish to see him, Mr Odiham ?

ODIHAM. [*Shifting from foot to foot*] Reely, Ma'am, it's so noo to me—all this. Would you advise me to ?

ANNE. Perhaps you'd better. Ask him to come in, Ellen.

ELLEN *opens the door, and the* REPORTER *enters.*

REPORTER. [*To ANNE*] How do you do, Ma'am ? Please forgive me—but my paper is so anxious to minimise any consequences of that paragraph.

ODIHAM. [*Sullenly*] You should 'a thought o' that before. What call 'ad you ? I've always read your paper and enjoyed it.

REPORTER. Exactly, Mr Odiham.

ODIHAM. [*Agape*] 'Ow's that ?

REPORTER. If you didn't enjoy cases like this, we shouldn't put them in, you know.

ODIHAM. Aow !

REPORTER. But you've changed your mind, I hope. Do let me see that Miss Odiham goes into the country quietly till the inquest's over. That's the only way to keep her out of it all.

ODIHAM. And what about her job ?

REPORTER. She could be indisposed. We pay all expenses.

ODIHAM. What do you say, Daisy ?

DAISY. Oh ! Yes, yes.

REPORTER. Come along, then, at once. We'll send your things down after you this afternoon.

ODIHAM. [*With sudden distrust*] 'Ow am I to know you're on the square ?

REPORTER. [*With a disarming gesture, very simply and nicely*] Mr Odiham, anyone can see that your daughter is very—sad. I really am quite a decent chap.

ANNE. You can trust him.

REPORTER. Thank you.

*But as he speaks, the door, Left, is opened, and
LADY MORECOMBE and COLONEL ROLAND
come in and stand, taking in the situation.*

LADY M. Is this the young woman ?

ANNE. Yes.

LADY M. [*To the GIRL*] We have been to your address.

ANNE. They came here to see if anything could be done.

LADY M. [*To the REPORTER*] And you ?

REPORTER. I was told to try and prevent things going further, Lady Morecombe.

LADY M. [*Advancing—to the GIRL*] Is it true, as this man says, that you were my son's——?

DAISY. [*Very low*] Yes.

LADY M. Is it true that he did this because of you?

DAISY [*Louder*] No.

LADY M. [*To the REPORTER, who is about to speak*] You hear that? Leave us, please.

REPORTER. I regret——

LADY M. Regret what sells your paper? Never!

REPORTER. Forgive me, that's very unfair. I hate this sort of thing as much as you, but I can't help the public taste. Ask Mr Odiham, ask anybody!

He goes out, Left.

COL. ROLAND. [*Crossing the room*] Anne, I want to speak to you.

He takes her arm and they go out, Right.

LADY M. Did you take my son away from his wife?

DAISY. No! Oh, no!

LADY M. What are you?

ODIHAM. I'd be obliged if you wouldn't tease 'er, Ma'am. She's 'ad a great shock.

LADY M. So have I.

ODIHAM. Excuse me, that ought to give you a fellow-feelin'.

DAISY. I'd have done anything for him.

LADY M. [*More softly*] I am an old woman, in great grief. I only want the truth, so as to know how best to serve my son's memory.

DAISY. Tell me what to do, and I'll do it, if I can.

ODIHAM. We're all in the same cart, I think.

LADY M. You're right. Will you deny your relationship to my son ?

ODIHAM. [*Scratching his head*] Perjury? That's awk!

LADY M. Is it known to anyone except that newspaper man ?

DAISY. Not of my telling.

ODIHAM. You can't keep them sort of things dark if the police get after it. To be irregular's one thing ; but to swear you ain't if you are, is askin' for trouble.

LADY M. How long had you known my son ?

DAISY. Nearly a year.

LADY M. Had you an allowance from him ?

DAISY. Never. It was for love.

LADY M. Will you go quietly away by yourself at once ?

DAISY. Oh ! yes.

But as she speaks, COLONEL ROLAND returns by the door Right. He is extremely grave.

LADY M. [*To him*] She will go away at once.

COL. ROLAND. Impossible.

LADY M. Why ?

He shakes his head. LADY MORECOMBE, after staring at him, speaks to the Odiham.

Will you wait a minute or two in the dining-room opposite.

The ODIHAMS go out, Left.

Why not, Colonel Roland ?

COL. ROLAND. Anne.

LADY M. Unfaithful ?——

COL. ROLAND. Colin and Anne went their own ways. But Colin had this girl ; Anne's conduct

could have had no bearing on his death. If the police know the whole, they will see that.

LADY M. You mean to give them this girl's name ?
[COLONEL ROLAND *nods*] It's treachery to the dead.

COL. ROLAND. I can't have Anne disgraced.

LADY M. Does she *want* Colin's name blackened ?

COL. ROLAND. No. But Anne's all I've got. To have her tarred and feathered before my eyes !

LADY M. And I ? [*With emotion*] Isn't it enough that my boy is dead ?

*She places her hand on the door just as the
MAID comes in.*

MAID. The detective, my lady. Shall I tell the mistress ?

LADY M. [*In alarm*] Where ?

MAID. In the hall, my lady.

LADY M. And those people ?

MAID. In the dining-room.

LADY M. Has he seen them ?

MAID. I don't think so, my lady.

LADY M. Bring him in here at once !

The MAID goes.

Colonel Roland ! You won't tell him—you can't !

COLONEL ROLAND *throws his head back and
stands very still. The DETECTIVE comes
in briskly.*

DETECTIVE. Lady Morecombe ? Your service.
Colonel Roland, I believe ? I've come to see your daughter, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. I'll fetch her.

He goes out, Right.

DETECTIVE. Sad business, my lady. Can you tell me of anything that bears on it ?

LADY M. Nothing.

DETECTIVE. You had no letter from your son ?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. Are you staying here ?

LADY M. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Possibly you'd like to withdraw ; it must all be very trying.

LADY M. No, thank you. I'll stay.

DETECTIVE. As you wish, my lady. But it may be a bit painful for you.

LADY M. I am used to pain.

DETECTIVE. [*As ANNE and her FATHER come in, Right*] Excuse me, Major Morecombe never had shell-shock, had he ?

LADY M. No ; but he went through every horror in the war.

DETECTIVE. [*Soberly*] We all did that. [*Turning to ANNE*] I've received information, Mrs Morecombe, that a young woman called here the morning after the event, in great distress. I have her address, but before I see her, I'd like to ask you what you know about the matter. [*From his central position he loses no gesture, neither the assenting movement of COLONEL ROLAND'S head, nor LADY MORECOMBE'S intense rigidity, nor ANNE'S compressed lips.*]

ANNE. Nothing.

DETECTIVE. Not aware of any reason why she should have come ?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Never saw her? [*Again he misses nothing—neither COLONEL ROLAND's jerked-up hand, nor LADY MORECOMBE's quick turn and look at ANNE, nor the droop of ANNE's eyes, raised again as she speaks.*]

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. This is a delicate matter, but I'd like a frank answer from someone. No knowledge of any intimacy between Major Morecombe and this young woman? [*To ANNE*] Madam?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. [*To LADY MORECOMBE*] My lady?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. [*To COLONEL ROLAND*] You, Sir?

There is a moment of suspense—a tiny shake of ANNE's head, a movement of LADY MORECOMBE's hands.

COL. ROLAND. [*After a long breath, with eyes almost closed*] No. [*A moment's silence.*]

DETECTIVE. In that case, as they're in the dining-room, I'll have her and her father in. [*He watches the sensation*] Kindly send for her, Madam.

ANNE moves to the bell by the fireplace.

COLONEL ROLAND takes a long breath of relief.

LADY M. Leave my son alone!

DETECTIVE. [*Quietly*] My Lady!

LADY MORECOMBE, *clasping her little thin hands together, sways slightly; then sinks down on to the chair at the bureau.*

The MAID enters, Left.

ANNE. Ask Mr and Miss Odiham to come in.

The MAID goes out.

DETECTIVE. I quite understand your reluctance, but, you'll excuse me—we want the truth.

ODIHAM *and his DAUGHTER come in from the Hall. The DETECTIVE looks shrewdly at the girl, and beckons her up to him.*

DETECTIVE. I'm the detective in charge of this matter. Your name is Daisy Odiham, of 48 Burdells Buildings ?

DAISY. Yes.

Her FATHER closes up to her ; COLONEL ROLAND is at the fireplace ; ANNE by the armchair.

DETECTIVE. You came here yesterday morning ?

DAISY, *whose eyes move restlessly, is silent.*

Answer, please.

DAISY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Why ?

DAISY. I was upset.

DETECTIVE. By what ?

ODIHAM. [*Stepping forward*] What d'you want to worry my girl for ? She knows nothin' o' this.

DETECTIVE. We shall see. [*To DAISY*] You heard of this death—what was it to you ?

DAISY. It's cruel ! [*She suddenly covers her face.*]

ODIHAM. What do you call this ? I tell you she knows nothing of why the Major shot hisself.

DETECTIVE. She'll have to answer on oath to-morrow in the box, unless she answers me now. [*To DAISY*] Come ! What was the Major's death to you ?

DAISY. [*Freeing her face and flinging out the word*]
The world !

DETECTIVE. You mean *he* was the world ?

DAISY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. And you to him ?

LADY M. [*Sharply*] Only my son could answer that.

DETECTIVE. [*Staring steadily at DAISY*] She knows what I mean. Were you ?

DAISY. [*Stony of a sudden*] No.

*The gestures of surprise from Anne and
COLONEL ROLAND, LADY MORECOMBE'S
relief, and ODIHAM'S uneasiness — the
DETECTIVE marks them all.*

DETECTIVE. When did you see the Major last ?

DAISY. The day before he——

DETECTIVE. Where ?

DAISY. At Richmond.

DETECTIVE. Now come—speak the truth—you were on terms with him ?

DAISY. No.

DETECTIVE. [*With a faint smile*] And yet he was the world to you. What are you ?

DAISY. [*Sullenly*] Waitress.

DETECTIVE. Respectable profession. You were pursuing this gentleman, then ?

DAISY. I loved him.

DETECTIVE. With no result ?

DAISY. I won't be questioned any more.

DETECTIVE. [*Soothingly*] Now, now !

ODIHAM *edges closer to his daughter and pulls her sleeve.*

Ah! *You* understand that it's no good telling lies to the Law. Your daughter was the Major's—Come, it's only fair to every one, out with it!

ODIHAM. Can't you see she's 'ighsterical?

DETECTIVE. [*To DAISY*] Give me the letter you had from Major Morecombe yesterday morning.

DAISY. I never had one.

DETECTIVE. What? When it gave you the news that brought you round here?

DAISY. It's a lie! I read it in the paper.

DETECTIVE. [*For the first time sharply*] Don't speak to me like that, my girl. Just answer my questions, and give me that letter.

DAISY. Oh! Won't somebody help me?

COL. ROLAND. [*With a step forward*] Leave the wretched girl alone! [*In a tone of old days*] Do you hear me, Inspector?

DETECTIVE. Yes, Sir; but we're not in the Army now. And, excuse my saying so, it's not to your interest, or to your daughter's, that she should refuse to answer me.

LADY M. [*Rising*] She *has* answered you. What she has said she will repeat on oath. She admired my son—many did—she loved him, if you like. And—that—is—all. [*She says this with such incision and finality that the DETECTIVE is for the moment thoroughly taken aback.*]

DETECTIVE. Tell me why your son committed suicide, and I will leave it at that, my lady.

LADY M. I *cannot*; but you will leave it at that, all the same.

DETECTIVE. [*Recovering himself*] Now, this is all very natural, no doubt, but it gets us no further. [*To the GIRL*] I'll give you a last chance. If you aren't frank, I shall start enquiring, and you best know how that'll suit you.

DAISY. [*With sudden passion*] I won't tell you a thing—not a thing—not if ever so! I won't say a word to hurt him!

ODIHAM. [*Warningly*] Daisy!

DAISY. Well, I won't. He's dead.

LADY MORECOMBE *puts her little thin hand on the girl's arm and gives it a squeeze.*

DETECTIVE. [*Impassively*] That's the Law defied, if ever I heard it.

COL. ROLAND. "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," Sergeant.

DETECTIVE. Precisely, Colonel; I know the saying. But it's my business to put the case up to the Coroner with every circumstance that'll throw light on this death. [*He crosses to the door, opens it and says*] Simpson, ask that reporter to come in.

ODIHAM. Why, this is the ruddy Inquisition! Come along, Daisy!

DETECTIVE. [*Calmly*] You can go, but your daughter can't.

*As he speaks, the REPORTER comes in. The
DETECTIVE stands with his back to the door.*

DETECTIVE. Kindly repeat to me what you said just now when I questioned you in the street.

The REPORTER, who is pivoting, and trying to take in the sense of the situation, fronts the DETECTIVE.

REPORTER. But why, Inspector? It's painful, and perfectly well known to everyone here.

LADY M. Haven't *you* finished mischief-making?

DETECTIVE. Just repeat it. Was this girl Major Morecombe's mistress?

REPORTER. [*Resentful of LADY MORECOMBE's words*] She told our representative so yesterday.

DETECTIVE. [*To the GIRL*] Do you still deny it?

DAISY has closed her eyes and sways.

ANNE. [*Crossing swiftly*] She's going to faint.

LADY M. [*Sharply*] Girl, don't faint!

The GIRL reopens her eyes.

DETECTIVE. And you still say you had no letter?

DAISY. [*In a dead voice*] I had no letter.

DETECTIVE. [*To ODIHAM*] You can take her away now. [*To the REPORTER*] You can go too. But mind! Anyone who plays tricks with her before the inquest will be up against it. Unless I'm given that letter, she'll have to go into the box.

ODIHAM. Well, you are a blanky bloke!

DETECTIVE. Thank you.

The ODIHAMS go out, ODIHAM half carrying his daughter. The REPORTER stands uncertain, but at a sharp motion of the DETECTIVE's chin, he too goes.

DETECTIVE. She had that letter right enough.

[*Turning sharply to ANNE*] Unless *you* can tell me who had it now, Ma'am. You've all had time to think things over.

ANNE. Mr Darrel received no letter.

DETECTIVE. Well, I've made every enquiry about the Major's affairs. There's nothing wrong anywhere. Bank balance good, no recent sale of securities; no debts to speak of. No monetary complications of any sort; no ill-health; and five years since the war. [*To LADY MORECOMBE*] Nothing wrong in your family, my lady?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. So I should say. His father was the great ironmaster, I believe?

LADY M. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Nothing wrong there?

LADY M. I know of nothing.

DETECTIVE. That's how it is, then. We're driven on to private life. [*To ANNE*] Yours, Madam, or his. I don't know how far you've confided in your father?

ANNE. Entirely.

DETECTIVE. I'm glad of that. Well, the day before his death the Major takes this girl to Richmond. And the evening of his death you spend with another gentleman. That's the case, [*With a sharp glance at LADY MORECOMBE and ANNE*] apart from the letter.

ANNE. Have you enquired for it?

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] I should say so. Posted in a pillar-box—sorted and sent out at eleven p.m. by

people dying for a sleep—that's a letter that only gets traced on the film, Ma'am.

COL. ROLAND. Anne, go.

ANNE *looks at him, and goes out, Right. The DETECTIVE eyes the tall figure to his right, the tiny figure to his left.*

COL. ROLAND. Now, Inspector, you were a soldier—use your reason.

DETECTIVE. Never allowed one in the Army, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. Try it for a change. My son-in-law had this girl, and my daughter's behaviour can have had nothing to do with his death.

LADY M. This poor foolish girl was utterly devoted. She cannot have been the cause.

COL. ROLAND. Neither of them can be. Come, Inspector!

DETECTIVE. You expect me to go up with this case, after two clear days, without a single fact that has any bearing whatever on this suicide of a well-known man? All I can say is, if I stood for that, neither the Coroner nor the Public would.

COL. ROLAND. But why drag in what has no bearing?

DETECTIVE. It's not for me to say what has bearing and what hasn't. You know nothing of inquests, perhaps. The Coroner will ask: When and where did this death take place; by whose hand; if by his own, what was his state of mind at the time? It's his state of mind I have to show to the best of my ability; and these are the only facts I have knowledge of that can have affected him.

LADY M. And will knowing his state of mind console *me*? What will help me, Inspector, is that no one shall think lightly of my son now he's dead.

DETECTIVE. [*With a shrug*] The custom's what it is, my lady. There's a feeling a man shouldn't take his life while he's got his wits.

LADY M. Do these facts of yours point to sound or to unsound mind?

DETECTIVE. That's very clever, my lady.

LADY M. Clever! I've lost my only son. It's like losing my sight. Clever!

DETECTIVE. [*Stubbornly*] I'm sorry. But——

COL. ROLAND. By the Lord, Inspector, I should have thought you more of a man!

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] Man enough to do my duty, Colonel.

COL. ROLAND. Duty! Wantonly to make a show of this! You see what it means to Lady Morecombe! As for me—I can't tell you what my daughter is to me—to watch her disgraced! One's only daughter pilloried in the papers! The Public all agog! Those women who come and gloat! I'm told there's never a death or a divorce where there isn't a pack o' women in furs and feathers. And this is far worse than a divorce. There was the poor fellow lying dead—when she came in from her . . .

LADY M. Colonel Roland has served the country all his life; he's been wounded three times. And my son was gallantry itself! Do you want to smirch his memory before everybody?

DETECTIVE. [*Moved*] I'm sure I've every feeling

for you both, my lady. These things come very hard on families. But aren't you making too much of it ? A little private life in these days—what is it ?

LADY M. [*Like a little statue of dignity*] We don't belong to these days. We ought to have been dead. Enough ! Colonel Roland, he means to do it ; nothing we can say will stop him !

DETECTIVE. [*Quickly*] The Law, my lady, not me. Get me that letter, and it may turn out different.

LADY M. In our belief, neither had the letter.

DETECTIVE. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Take my word for it, one of them had. Well, we've the best part of a day to get it still. Good morning !

The DETECTIVE bows first to one and then to the other ; but neither makes a sign. He makes a vexed movement of his head and goes out. There is a moment's silence.

COL. ROLAND. Has the girl got it ?

LADY M. No ; I'm sure she was speaking the truth.

COL. ROLAND. Anne is positive.

LADY M. We're in a net. Colonel Roland, haven't you influence enough to stop this ?

COL. ROLAND. I ? I'm nobody. On the shelf. I'll try my lawyers, but for the life of me I don't see what they can do.

LADY M. Try ! Try everything ! Forgive me for what I said !

COL. ROLAND. I know—I know ! My poor friend !
He takes her hand and puts it to his lips, passes on and goes out into the hall.

LADY MORECOMBE, left alone, moves restlessly.

Hearing the outer door close, she goes to the window, slightly draws back the curtain, and watches his departure, then stands gazing at the armchair, with her hand to her forehead.

ANNE comes in from Right. She has on a hat and carries a dressing-bag. Seeing her, LADY MORECOMBE drops her hand, and reins back from the chair.

ANNE. I'm going to my father's. You will like to be alone here.

LADY M. I can leave, instead.

ANNE. No. It's Colin's house. [*She is moving on.*]

LADY M. Wait! Was it your doing that you were apart?

ANNE. No.

LADY M. You loved each other when you married.

ANNE. We thought so.

LADY M. Were you the first to be unfaithful?

ANNE. It was not I who broke off our life together.

LADY M. Were there scenes between you?

ANNE. Never.

LADY M. Anne! Are you keeping anything back?

ANNE. Nothing.

LADY M. Do you love this other man?

ANNE. With all my heart.

LADY M. Did Colin love this girl?

ANNE. I can't tell you.

LADY M. Nobody can tell me anything. Oh! God! [*Suddenly*] I suppose you are glad that he is gone?

ANNE. [*Wincing*] That's not fair. You know it's not !

LADY M. The heart is never fair. But you have none, perhaps.

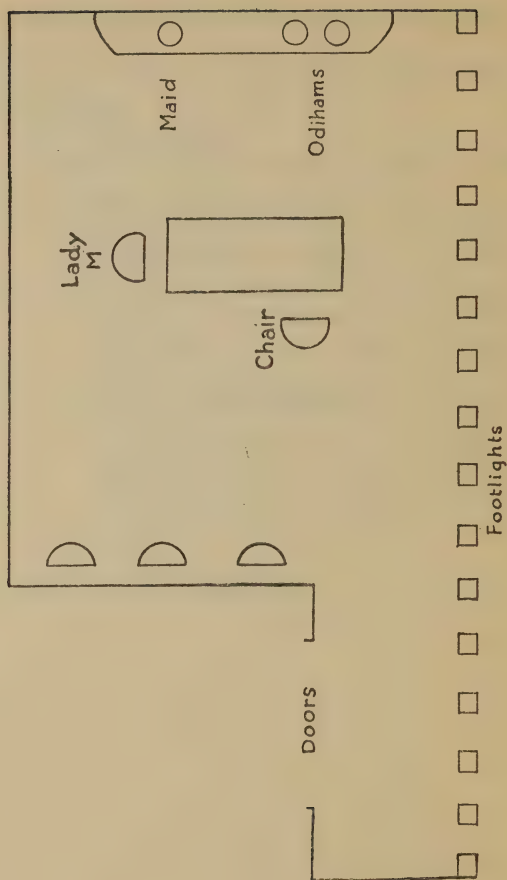
ANNE. I have told you.

There is a long look between them, then ANNE passes on and out into the hall.

At the closing of the door, LADY MORECOMBE moves and turns out the light. A streak of sunlight from where the curtain was left by her half drawn falls across the armchair. She moves into it, standing behind the chair, as if looking down on someone seated there. Slowly her hands go out as if taking a head between them. She bends and presses her lips to the head that she does not hold. There is the sound of a kiss, and very low the word : " Colin ! "

CURTAIN.

ACT III



ACT III

Just before eleven o'clock the following day.

A waiting-room at the Coroner's Court, rather small, and furnished like a railway station waiting-room, but fresher-looking, having walls of green distemper, with a dado. A narrow oblong table stands parallel to a long seat along the wall, Left. There are some chairs against the right-hand wall, which turns at a right angle, forward, forming an alcove in which, facing the audience, is the wide open doorway leading to lobby, public entrance, and Court. (See Design.)

Seated on the long seat are MR ODIHAM and his DAUGHTER, and a little way from them, the maid ELLEN. At the top of the table, in a chair, sits LADY MORECOMBE, very still and alone. In the alcove and lobby is a bustle of figures, the pivot of which is the Coroner's CLERK, a moustachioed man in a gown.

CORONER'S C. Only those interested in the case.

LADY. [*With aigrette*] Oh! but we're very interested. Can't you find us seats?

CORONER'S C. Witnesses?

LADY. [*With aigrette, pushing forward a younger*

lady] Not exactly, but my friend is a great friend of Mrs Morecombe.

CORONER'S C. You can go and try, but the Court's full.

LADY. [*With aigrette*] What a bore ! Come along, Ursula ! We must get in.

REPORTER. [*Forman, showing his card*] Press.

CORONER'S C. All right—room at the table, I think.

The REPORTER stands a moment looking at the ODIHAMS ; suddenly he sees LADY MORECOMBE beckoning with her black-gloved hand. He goes to her, standing Right of table.

LADY M. [*Pointing to a paper on the table before her*] Did you put that headline ?

REPORTER. I've nothing to do with headlines. Excuse me, I have to get my seat.

He moves quickly back, and encounters COLONEL ROLAND and ANNE, coming in.

COL. ROLAND. [*In a low voice*] Hell take your paper, Sir !

REPORTER. [*With a little involuntary skip*] Quite ! Quite !

He goes out through the throng.

COLONEL ROLAND and ANNE stand by the table, Right Forward. He makes a motion of the hand to MR ODIHAM, and bows to LADY MORECOMBE.

MAN. [*With THREE LADIES, at the door*] I'm from the Air Ministry—could you manage to get us in ?

CORONER'S C. [*Glancing at the card*] I'll see, Sir.
. . . Now then, please, only witnesses in this room.
[*He shepherds out figures by the door, then turns to those in the body of the room*] All witnesses ?

COL. ROLAND. I'm with my daughter—Mrs Morecombe.

CORONER'S C. Oh ! Very good. [*To LADY MORECOMBE*] And you, Madam ?

LADY M. My son——

CORONER'S C. Indeed ! [*Respectfully*] Ahem ! I don't know if you wish to—er—view the proceedings, Madam ? If so, I shall be happy to have a chair put for you.

LADY M. [*Standing up*] Yes. I will come.

CORONER'S C. [*Leading*] This way then, Madam.

LADY M. [*Avoiding ANNE, but looking up into COLONEL ROLAND'S face*] Nothing, I suppose ? [*He shakes his head*] Courage !

COLONEL ROLAND *nods, and she goes out, following the CLERK.*

The room is now empty, but for the ODIHAMS, the MAID, ANNE, COLONEL ROLAND, and a CONSTABLE standing in the open doorway. FIGURES are still bustling outside in the entrance lobby.

COL. ROLAND. Sit down, my dear.

ANNE *sits Right of the table, and idly reaches for the paper, turning it over blankly as one does at the dentist's. COLONEL ROLAND stands grasping the back of her chair, gnawing his moustache. The DETECTIVE*

appears in the doorway with a bit of paper in his hand. He moves quickly in a little and takes in the FIVE FIGURES, of whom ODIHAM alone notices him—with a muttered “The blanky blank!” Then, moving back, he speaks to the CONSTABLE.

DETECTIVE. [*In a low voice*] The three women—see they don’t flit. I’ve got the officer, and the two doctors; that’s the lot. [*The CONSTABLE nods*] Right, then! I’ll come for them.

He goes.

ANNE. [*Suddenly turning*] Don’t come with me, Dad—*please!*

COL. ROLAND. Let you go alone, child? Impossible!

ANNE. Please, *please!* Father! I can’t bear it, if you’re there.

COL. ROLAND. My dear, I must see they treat you——

ANNE. I shall be all right, Dad—really I shall. It’ll be a thousand times worse if you come. Please! [*She takes one of his buttons and twists it.*]

COL. ROLAND. [*Muttering*] Those harpies and cats—those writing monkeys—feasting on it!

ANNE. So long as *you* don’t see, I shan’t care.

COL. ROLAND. D’you think I’ll not be seeing, if I stay here? I’ll see every bit of it, as plain as your face.

ANNE. Nothing’s so bad as it seems beforehand. [*With a smile*] Really and truly, I shall be all right.

COLONEL ROLAND *turns abruptly away,*

marches up, down, and puts his hand on her shoulder.

COL. ROLAND. So be it, then. I'll stay here, and God help me.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in a step from the door*] The Coroner's taken his seat, ladies.

They look at him in silence. He moves back.

ODIHAM. Time 'e took something. Hangin' about! You'd think it was a ruddy first night—this! [*To the MAID*] I say, come down 'ere.

The MAID moves down beside the GIRL. ANNE and the COLONEL watch silently.

ODIHAM. She's not opened 'er mouth all mornin'. However's she goin' through with this? 'Ave you got a smellin' salt about yer?

The MAID shakes her head.

ANNE. [*Going across*] Take one of these.

ODIHAM. Thank you, Ma'am. A sniff in time saves nine.

ANNE breaks an ammonia capsule and waves it before DAISY's face.

ODIHAM. Rouse up, Daisy. Sniff!

The GIRL sniffs apathetically. ANNE moves back.

ODIHAM. [*To the MAID*] I never seen 'er like this in all me life. I say, would you kindly look after 'er in there? Reely I'm afraid to trust meself. I might come it unpleasant. I'll be 'andy 'ere when she comes back.

CONSTABLE. [*Taking a step*] Won't be three minutes now. The Jury 'ave gone to view the body.

DAISY. [*Starting up*] Oh! God!

There is a perfectly dead silence. The CONSTABLE, an oldish, wary fellow, stares; the others are motionless, with their eyes on the girl. She sinks back into her seat, and sits as before. ODIHAM fans her with his hat. The DETECTIVE appears in the doorway, carefully out of sight of his victims, and signs to the CONSTABLE.

CONSTABLE. Now, please, ladies.

ANNE. [*Advancing towards DAISY*] Ellen! [*The MAID takes the girl's arm. To ODIHAM*] We'll look after her, Mr Odiham. [*Taking the GIRL's hand—firmly*] Come! We must see it through!

The GIRL rises and goes between them like a sleep-walker. The CONSTABLE closes them in as they pass through the door. The TWO MEN stand as if at "Attention."

COL. ROLAND. [*To himself*] I've seen men shot, but their eyes were bandaged. [*He continues to stand unmoving.*]

ODIHAM shuffles to the table, takes up the paper, goes back with it to his seat, sits down with it on his knee, rubs his hand across his eyes, gives a sort of gulp, and says.

ODIHAM. This Chelsea lot's pretty 'ot stuff. Wouldn't say but what they'll win this afternoon.

The COLONEL starts, then moves, and sits on the table, facing ODIHAM.

COL. ROLAND. Ah! They'll be a good team, I suppose.

A short silence. They listen. Then ODIHAM takes out a pipe.

ODIHAM. D'you think I could 'ave a smoke, Colonel ?

COL. ROLAND. I shouldn't think so.

ODIHAM. Well, I must chance it. Can't stand it 'ere without. [*Filling his pipe*] Your daughter's a rare-plucked one, Colonel, if you'll excuse the liberty.

COL. ROLAND. Women are braver than men—no doubt of it.

ODIHAM. And yet they'll run from a mouse. You should see my girl with a black-beetle ! Abrams on the sprint is nothing to 'er ! [*Stops. With a jerk*] I think this Labour's come to stay, Colonel ; but p'raps you're not a politician.

COL. ROLAND. Not since I cut my wisdom teeth.

ODIHAM. Ah ! Public life ! It's a put-up job.

The COLONEL'S head goes round as if he heard a sound. ODIHAM, too, stays, pipe in hand, as if listening. They relax.

ODIHAM. [*Holding up the paper*] Did you see these 'eadlines ? "The Mysterious Suicide," "England's Greatest Flying Man." "Sensational Developments Expected." That's what's filled the 'ouse to-day. They're turnin' away money.

COL. ROLAND. Damn them !

ODIHAM. Everything's a show nowadays. If you get two sparrers scrappin' you'll have a ring round 'em in no time. T'other day I read about an American journalist who missed the show when that

man an' wife—you remember—went over Niagara Falls on a niceberg. There they was—slowly driftin' towards it for an 'our an' a 'alf; thousands watchin', and nobody could save 'em. Then a bloke thought of hangin' ropes down from the bridge; the man caught 'old of one all right, but the woman missed 'ers; so the man dropped 'is again and over they went together. The journalist said it was the greatest tragedy of 'is life that 'e 'adn't seen it.

COL. ROLAND. The beauty!

ODIHAM. Well, you can't say but what we do like to see other people put through it. What would you 'ave done, Colonel, with a show like that before yer very eyes?

COL. ROLAND. Run like a hare.

ODIHAM. [*Shaking his head*] Nao! Not when it come to the point. You'd 'a stood watchin' like the others, till your eyes dropped out. It's human nature to want to see all there is.

COL. ROLAND. I never would go to a bull-fight.

ODIHAM. [*Meditatively*] And yet you must 'ave seen a lot of blood in your time. [*Pause, while they listen*] Excuse me, but 'ave you a match? [*The COLONEL produces a box of matches*] Thank you. [*ODIHAM lights his pipe and blows a puff or two.*]

COL. ROLAND. What's that? [*They listen.*]

ODIHAM. I fancy it was a car. Some of them cars make very 'uman noises.

COL. ROLAND. Torturing women!

ODIHAM. [*Puffing*] Colonel, what made the Major do it? D'you think there was *another* woman in it?

COL. ROLAND. [*Making an impatient movement*]
Do you take him for a Mormon?

ODIHAM. Well, there must ha' been 'ot stuff
somewhere, to make him bust the boiler like that.

COL. ROLAND. God only knows why a man takes
his own life!

ODIHAM. Ah! 'E 'as to know a lot.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving from the door*] No smoking
in there, please.

ODIHAM *removes his pipe and lays it on the
seat. The CONSTABLE moves back.*

ODIHAM. The Law wants plumbin', don't it?
'Tain't 'uman. [*They listen. Suddenly*] Well, I
can't stick it 'ere without a smoke. [*He rises*] I
think I'll go and 'ang about outside, Colonel.

COLONEL ROLAND *nods. ODIHAM passes him,
goes out, and is seen speaking to the
CONSTABLE in the lobby. The COLONEL
sits down at the table with his back to the
alcove, resting his head on his hands.*

CONSTABLE. [*Close to the door, speaking to a new-
comer*] Whom do you want, Sir?

The newcomer comes in—he is seen to be
DARREL.

DARREL. Mrs Morecombe.

CONSTABLE. The widow? She's in Court now, but
she'll be down before long, I daresay. If you'll wait
in here? Perhaps I could get word for you of
whether she's been taken yet. [*He receives a coin*]
I'll do it, Sir.

DARREL. Thank you.

He comes in ; strung up to the last pitch of intensity, he walks, unseeing, across to the long seat, picking up from it the paper, dropping it again, and passing up, Back, to the head of the table, where he stands looking towards the alcove. COLONEL ROLAND has remained motionless, with his head on his hands. DARREL becomes conscious of him, and involuntarily covers the lower part of his face with his hand.

CONSTABLE. [*Reappearing*] They've just got through with her, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. [*Coming out of his stillness*] With whom ?

CONSTABLE. The widow, Sir. As she found the body, they took her first. [*To DARREL*] Sometimes witnesses comes out, and sometimes they stays—you can't tell.

The COLONEL stares at him without replying. The CONSTABLE steps back into the lobby ; the COLONEL, turning, becomes half-conscious of who DARREL is, gets up and moves a step or two towards him.

DARREL. [*Answering his look*] Yes—I am. Colonel Roland, I suppose ?

COL. ROLAND. [*Drawing himself up*] You have much to answer for.

DARREL. If it hadn't been for you, Sir, we should have gone off long ago.

COL. ROLAND. Do you suppose that I should wish an affair to be clandestine ?

DARREL. No; but Anne——

COL. ROLAND. Why didn't you have the manliness to insist?

DARREL. [*Hotly*] I see no manliness in forcing the woman you love. She couldn't bear to hurt you.

COL. ROLAND. Then you should have waited till I was out of the way.

DARREL. Yes, Sir; but we are in love.

COL. ROLAND. That's no excuse for dishonour.

DARREL. Morecombe and she were quite estranged before I knew her.

COL. ROLAND. Is that true?

DARREL. Absolutely.

COL. ROLAND. Um! What are you going to do now?

DARREL. Marry her—take her abroad at once. I'd have cut off my hand to save her *that*— [*He jerks his head towards the door*] How long has she been there?

COL. ROLAND. One can die many deaths in ten minutes.

CONSTABLE. [*From lobby*] There's a gentleman for you in there, Madam.

DARREL. Anne!

ANNE comes in. She has fixed red spots in her cheeks. She moves to the end of the table and sits down facing the audience, with her back to the two men. DARREL has moved quickly down Left of the table, COLONEL ROLAND to the back of her chair.

DARREL. Anne! Darling!

ANNE *just shakes her head and does not answer, her lips quiver ; her expression is that of one who has been through, without giving way, something too much for her nerves. She sits without movement, staring before her.*

COL. ROLAND. Shall we go, my dear ?

No sound.

DARREL. Anne ! Speak !

ANNE. [*Shakes her head*] I—may—be wanted—again.

She shivers, then controls herself.

COL. ROLAND. By the Lord—it's too much !

DARREL *sinks on one knee and kisses her hand. No movement. He gets up abruptly and stands interrogating the COLONEL.*

COL. ROLAND. Water, Anne ?

ANNE. Nothing.

DARREL *makes another impulsive movement, but the COLONEL beckons him, and they move up to the head of the table.*

COL. ROLAND. [*In a low voice*] Let her be ! I saw a woman on the North-west Frontier once—— Um ! There's more than one kind of outrage. The nerves want time.

CONSTABLE'S VOICE. [*At the door*] You won't find room, Sir.

LIEUT. OSWALD'S VOICE. [*Outside*] But I tell you I've got something for the Coroner.

CONSTABLE. Step in here, then. [*Stepping in,*

followed by the speaker—a man about thirty, of a naval cut] Well, Sir, what is it ; and I'll see what I can do for you.

He receives nothing but a card. DARREL and the COLONEL have moved back, watching ANNE.

CONSTABLE. [*After reading the card*] Lieutenant Oswald, His Majesty's Ship *Zéus*. [*Salutes.*]

OSWALD. I got this letter at Portsmouth, Constable, only this morning, The Coroner ought to have it at once. I've been on manœuvres—this is the first I've heard of this business. My poor old pal ! [*Holding out an envelope.*]

CONSTABLE. [*Scrutinising envelope*] From the deceased ?

OSWALD. Yes.

CONSTABLE. I'll get the Sergeant in charge, Sir.

OSWALD. [*Suddenly perceiving ANNE, who has turned and is staring at him*] Mrs Morecombe ! I'm so sor—— [*Breaking off at the look on her face*] I—I'm frightfully cut up.

ANNE. [*Bitterly*] The letter ?

OSWALD. Only just reached me.

ANNE. Too late.

OSWALD. What——

The DETECTIVE has entered, followed by the

CONSTABLE.

DETECTIVE. [*Brusquely*] Now, Sir, what's this ? You've got a letter ?

OSWALD *hands the letter.* The DETECTIVE

compares the handwriting on the envelope with that of other letters, then opens it and reads swiftly.

DETECTIVE. My God ! Come with me, Sir !

He leads out, and OSWALD follows.

The CONSTABLE goes back to his place in the doorway.

DARREL. Who was that ?

COL. ROLAND. Morecombe's best man.

ANNE has turned to the table, and is sitting with her forehead on her hand.

Speak to her now ! [*He moves up the room and stands with his back turned. DARREL goes to the front end of the table and bends over her.*]

DARREL. Anne !

ANNE. Who minds being skinned ? Do I show ? Am I bleeding ? Their eyes !

Stir in the lobby.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in*] The Sergeant's sent down to say you won't be required further, Ma'am. [*Moves out.*]

DARREL. Come, Anne, come—out of this !

ANNE. [*Turning up her face with closed eyes*] Put my mask on, Geof—it's slipped !

DARREL. [*Touching her face*] Darling ! [*He takes her arm and leads her out.*]

COL. ROLAND. [*Spinning round and coming quickly down*] Begad, I'd like um at the end of a pistol ! [*He levels his hand as if to fire.*]

CONSTABLE. Beg pardon, Sir ?

COL. ROLAND. [*Conscious of the comic*] Not you, my man.

CONSTABLE. Anything I can get you, Sir ?

COL. ROLAND. Yes—human nature with its mouth open.

He goes out.

The CONSTABLE'S mouth opens ; rolling his eyes, he looks round the empty room as if for damage done, adjusts a chair, takes up the paper, folds it ; crosses to the far side and comes on ODIHAM'S pipe, takes it up rather as if he were arresting somebody, holds it out, looks at it, examining it as if it were a piece of evidence, then places it in his side pocket and buttons it up. Then, with a final look round he takes the paper and returns towards the door.

ODIHAM'S VOICE. [*Outside*] Take her out in the air. Shan't be a tick ; I left my pipe.

He comes in and crosses to the long bench. The CONSTABLE regards him with an unmoved face.

ODIHAM. [*Puzzled*] 'Ere's where I left it. [*To the CONSTABLE*] Seen a pipe ?

CONSTABLE. What sort o' pipe ?

ODIHAM. Briar—bit gone in the stem.

CONSTABLE. Any marks on it ?

ODIHAM. Marks ? What d'you think ? Tattooed on the left forearm ? Just a pipe.

CONSTABLE [*Producing pipe*] This the article ?

ODIHAM. That's it !

CONSTABLE. By rights I ought to hand it in at Scotland Yard. [*He seems to weigh the pipe.*]

ODIHAM. Aoh ! I shouldn't like you to be wastin' your time over me. [*Holding out a bob*] 'Ow's that ?

CONSTABLE. [*Taking the bob*] A pipe's a man's friend.

ODIHAM. [*Taking the pipe*] Ah ! about the only one 'e 'as. 'Ave you got a light ?

The CONSTABLE hands him a box of matches and ODIHAM lights his pipe.

Well, you 'aven't too cheery a job among the bodies —So long !

The CONSTABLE's mouth opens, but ODIHAM has hurried out.

The CONSTABLE puts the bob away and steps out into the lobby. His voice is heard.

CONSTABLE. Now then, make way for the Jury, there ! In here, gentlemen. You'll find all in order for considering your verdict. In here.

He comes back into the doorway. And the JURY pass him one by one ; eight decent men fresh from a painful scene, and divided in expression between relief and responsibility. The FOREMAN, a veterinary surgeon's assistant, has a letter in his hand.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in after them*] Got everything you want, gentlemen ?

FOREMAN. Yes, thank you.

The CONSTABLE goes out and closes the door.

We might as well sit down while we're thinking it over.

FOUR JURYMEN *sit on the long seat, Left ;
THREE on chairs to Right of table. The
FOREMAN sits at the head of the table.*

FOREMAN. Well, gentlemen, we're clear, I suppose, that deceased came by his death on Monday night last between eight and nine o'clock, in his own house at Kensington ?

There is a general assent.

That's agreed then. Now, did he take his own life ? That's the second question we have to answer.

2ND JURYMEN. [*Next on Left of FOREMAN—a grey-headed man in a small way of business*] Can't be a doubt about that, after the letter, and what the doctors said. [*Pause.*]

FOREMAN. Anyone who has a doubt, give it a voice, please.

No voice.

We're agreed, then. He took his own life. Now, what was his state of mind when he took it ? That's the third question before us.

3RD JURYMEN [*Second on Right of FOREMAN—a goggle-eyed commercial traveller*] Ah ! It'll take a bit of answerin', in my opinion. I'd like that letter read again, Mr Foreman. It's a painful letter, and I'd like it read again.

FOREMAN. Very well ! It's addressed to Lieutenant Oswald, H.M.S. *Zéus*.

5TH JURYMEN. [*Right front chair, a working jeweller, rather æsthetic*] Zeus—it's ancient Greek.

6TH JURYMAN. [*Left, at the front end of the seat—a self-owning barber and hard little nut*] Let's 'ave it in plain English.

FOREMAN. *Zéus*, Portsmouth. And it's headed from his own house: "17 Southern Place, Kensington. March 23rd"—the fatal Monday—"8.15 p.m." He put it precise, you see. This is the letter:—

"My dear old Pal,

"I write to you as my oldest and best friend. I am going off the deep end in a few minutes."

4TH JURYMAN. [*Right, next FOREMAN—a chemist*] One moment, Mr Foreman. Speaking as a chemist: "Off the deep end" is an expression I've heard used, but never in that particular connection.

6TH JURYMAN. Speakin' as an 'airdresser, it means losin' your 'air.

FOREMAN. It can't mean anything here but what he was going to do.

3RD JURYMAN. That's right. Go on.

FOREMAN. [*Resuming*] "Off the deep end in a few minutes. Neither you nor anyone else, not even my mother, or Anne in the days before we split, have known that I have twice been clean off my chump. It was that, you know, which really botched up my life with Anne. She wanted children and I daren't, and couldn't tell her why. I simply couldn't tell anybody. The first time was soon after the war. I was up in Scotland fishing—a very remote place: for three days it was all darkness. I had only a gillie with me, and I swore him to silence. The second time was just before we definitely split—I

was away in Belgium over that A.B.Z. parachute design of mine. For two days I wandered about, out of my wits, and came to myself in a wood. My dear old man, I don't suppose you can realise what it means to be at the mercy of a thing like that, to have the feeling of its coming on me—slowly, slowly creeping on me again. And not to know whether next time won't be the last." [*The FOREMAN coughs*] "I go about in"—here's a word I can't read—"fer"—no—ah!—"terror"—that's it, "terror." "I've known for days that it's coming on me again now. I can't stick it, old man. Better for myself and everybody that I should clear out. Good-bye, and God bless you. Comfort my poor mother.

Your old Pal,

COLIN MORECOMBE."

The FOREMAN's voice has been distinctly husky during the reading of the last words, and an audible sniff has been heard from the 3RD JURYMAN. In fact, all the JURYMEN have shown signs of discomfort, except the youngest, almost a boy, and the 6TH JURYMAN, who have listened unmoved.

5TH JURYMAN. It's a dreadfully sad letter.

6TH JURYMAN. The question is, is it a sane letter? The Coroner 'ad a word to say on that. But it struck me that gentleman was thinkin' more of 'imself than of deceased.

7TH JURYMAN. [*On the Left, second from front—a bright-haired greengrocer*] You can't honestly say

there's a word in it you or I couldn't have written. He's got everything exact, even to the split with his wife.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! We needn't think about *that* lady.

3RD JURYMAN. No better than she should be, I should say.

5TH JURYMAN. Well, there was his own affair with the girl.

2ND JURYMAN. Pity they brought that in, in my opinion. The Coroner was right to stop that evidence, when he got the letter. After all, the poor fellow's gone.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! I rather think that 'tec put his foot in his mouth, there.

4TH JURYMAN. Saved a faint, anyway, stopping her evidence—never saw a girl so white; and I've had some in my shop.

FOREMAN. We must keep to the point—his sanity.

6TH JURYMAN. He was sane enough when he took the girl to Richmond, anyway,

5TH JURYMAN. The day before—you can't count that.

7TH JURYMAN. The letter was the last thing he did; we needn't go further back than that.

FOREMAN. To my mind, gentlemen, the important words are the "slowly creeping on me again." As a Vet, I can tell you that a dog knows when he's going mad. And you may take it from me that as soon as he knows it, you've got to destroy him—practically he's mad already. Is a *man* still sane

when he feels insanity creeping on him? That's the *real* question.

6TH JURYMAN. If he was insane when he wrote that letter, we're all as mad as 'atters.

7TH JURYMAN. There it is, you see: the Coroner warned us not to bring him in of unsound mind unless we truly felt he was.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! that gentleman—*full* of his own position! Did he pay any attention to that question I asked him? Not 'e!

3RD JURYMAN. [*Suddenly*] Hero in the war! I remember that flight of 'is perfectly. And there he lies—poor feller!

5TH JURYMAN. I'm thinking of his family.

6TH JURYMAN. We're not concerned with the widder in this case; *she* 'as 'er consolations.

5TH JURYMAN. His mother hasn't.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! That was the little one in black.

FOREMAN. There's always someone to be hurt. Well, gentlemen, it must be one thing or the other.

A silence.

7TH JURYMAN. I can't see a madman using the words "off his chump."

3RD JURYMAN. Why not? It's a very 'andy expression.

7TH JURYMAN. I think if a man was mad, he wouldn't use slang.

2ND JURYMAN. Some men'd use slang in their graves. [*To his neighbour—the boy, 8TH JURYMAN*] What do *you* say?

8TH JURYMAN. [*Startled*] I? Oh! Mad.

4TH JURYMAN. Mr Foreman, I'd like to say a word for the Coroner. I thought him very fair; and on the whole I should say he was against Insanity.

6TH JURYMAN. Too many insane verdicts lately; that's what's the matter with him. We'll vote independent of that gentleman.

FOREMAN. Very well! I'll take a vote. . . . Those in favour of unsound mind hold up their hands.

*His own, and those of the 2ND, 3RD, 5TH, and
8TH JURYMEN are held up.*

Contrary?

*Those of the 7TH and 4TH are held up. The
6TH does not hold up his at all.*

6TH JURYMAN. I thought so; not agreed—we want a little more discussion. They've brought us away from our businesses—let 'em wait for us.

7TH JURYMAN. Honestly, I don't see how he could have written that letter if he'd been insane at the time of writing.

4TH JURYMAN. I really think, gentlemen, we should follow the Coroner, with his experience.

6TH JURYMAN. Well, I don't.

5TH JURYMAN [*Heatedly*] Then why didn't you hold up your hand?

6TH JURYMAN. Wait and see!

FOREMAN. [*Calming them*] Now, gentlemen, please If you'd like to have *my* views. I've been on a Coroner's Jury before. In my opinion there's *always* a doubt in these cases, and it does no harm to anyone to

give the benefit of it to the deceased. That's human nature, and human nature's the best guide, after all. Who can tell to a tick when a man's over the edge? I don't see what they want to ask the question for at all. Where and when did a man die? Did he die by his own hand? Yes. But what was his state of mind? No. Sound or unsound, he's dead. In this case he tells us himself he was mad, or on the point of it. The benefit o' the doubt, gentlemen.

4TH JURYMAN. Mr Foreman, I think you're right, after all.

2ND JURYMAN. Certainly he is. It's common sense. Speaking from the business point of view: am I going to do a deal with a man who writes a letter like that? Course I'm not. That's the plain test.

7TH JURYMAN. Well, if you put it that way—I'm sure I don't want to be inhuman.

6TH JURYMAN. He was as sane as you or me when he wrote that letter.

FOREMAN. Do I understand that you follow the Coroner, after all, Sir?

6TH JURYMAN. Not much! Unsound mind, every time.

FOREMAN. We're agreed, then. The deceased took his own life, in his own house, between eight and nine in the evening, on Monday last, when of unsound mind. Shall we offer an expression of sympathy with his family?

6TH JURYMAN. Not the widder—confine it to his mother.

FOREMAN. Well, perhaps that'll meet the case better.

General assent.

Come along then, gentlemen. We'll go back and give it them.

They file out.

The CONSTABLE comes in, looking over the room as if for another pipe. LADY MORECOMBE comes in.

LADY M. Officer !

CONSTABLE. Madam !

LADY M. Can I see the reporters before they go ?

CONSTABLE. I'm afraid it's not in the book, Madam, for any witness——

LADY M. I was not a witness.

CONSTABLE. Ah ! I remember—you're the deceased's mother. I don't know, I'm sure, Madam. It's not in my department. [*He stands stock.*]

LADY M. I know that. [*She puts a note into his hand*] I only want you to get me the first who comes down.

CONSTABLE. Well, I see no reason, Ma'am, why you shouldn't see the Press, as one private person to another.

LADY M. Then please—— !

CONSTABLE. I will, Ma'am ; very glad to do you the service.

He goes out.

LADY MORECOMBE moves to the end of the table and stands trembling, working her

lips. The CONSTABLE returns, followed by the REPORTER, FORMAN.

CONSTABLE. This is the first down, Madam. Lady wants to see you, Sir.

He withdraws. The REPORTER moves towards LADY MORECOMBE.

REPORTER. Yes, Lady Morecombe? Excuse me, I'm in a hurry.

LADY M. I've been rude to you, I'm afraid. Please forgive me.

REPORTER. Oh! Our backs are broad, thank you.

LADY M. As a human being in distress, I beg you: please don't put that girl into your report!

REPORTER. [*Affected*] Lady Morecombe, I—I must hand it in; but I'll gladly ask them not to mention her. I daresay they won't; her evidence didn't matter, as it turned out. You left before the verdict. It's "Unsound mind," if that's any consolation to you.

CONSTABLE [*Appearing*] Here's another for you, Madam. Press Association.

2ND REPORTER. [*From just within the doorway*] What is it?

LADY M. My son's name, Sir. The girl——

2ND REPORTER. Oh! That's all right, Ma'am. The Coroner's just said she mustn't be mentioned.

REPORTER. Thank the Lord! I'm so glad, Lady Morecombe!

LADY MORECOMBE *hides her face, overcome for the first time. The 2ND REPORTER, with a sound of sympathy, follows the first out.*

LADY MORECOMBE *has turned to the wall, Left, weeping silently behind her handkerchief.* THREE LADIES *and the MAN from the Air Ministry have come into the alcove.*

THE MAN. Well, the show's over. I've sent for the car.

1ST LADY. I'd no idea it'd be so frightfully interesting, John.

2ND LADY. I've always wanted to see a case.

3RD LADY. Never was so thrilled in my life as when that girl——

2ND LADY. Oh! The wife's evidence was much the most exciting——

1ST LADY. She was rather wonderful, I thought. It must have been a nasty jar to have to——

3RD LADY. There's nothing like real life, after all. Beats the theatre hollow. Only it was *much* too short.

THE MAN. Of course the verdict was tosh. A man isn't insane when he knows what he's doing.

1ST LADY. But I thought Juries always said "Insane" as a matter of course?

3RD LADY. Wasn't the Coroner amusin'? So professional!

2ND LADY. Well, poor man, what else *could* he be?

THE MAN. Morecombe's a real loss.

3RD LADY. It *was* a piece of luck the letter only coming like that—all the drama was in seeing the witnesses——

THE MAN. Pretty rough on his wife, and that girl !

2ND LADY. Oh ! well, bad luck, of course. Still, *that* was the really exciting part.

1ST LADY. Thanks awfully, John, for bringing us down. If was *too* thrilling !

THE MAN. Hsssh !

A sudden silence comes over them ; they have become aware of the black figure of LADY MORECOMBE standing close by, looking at them.

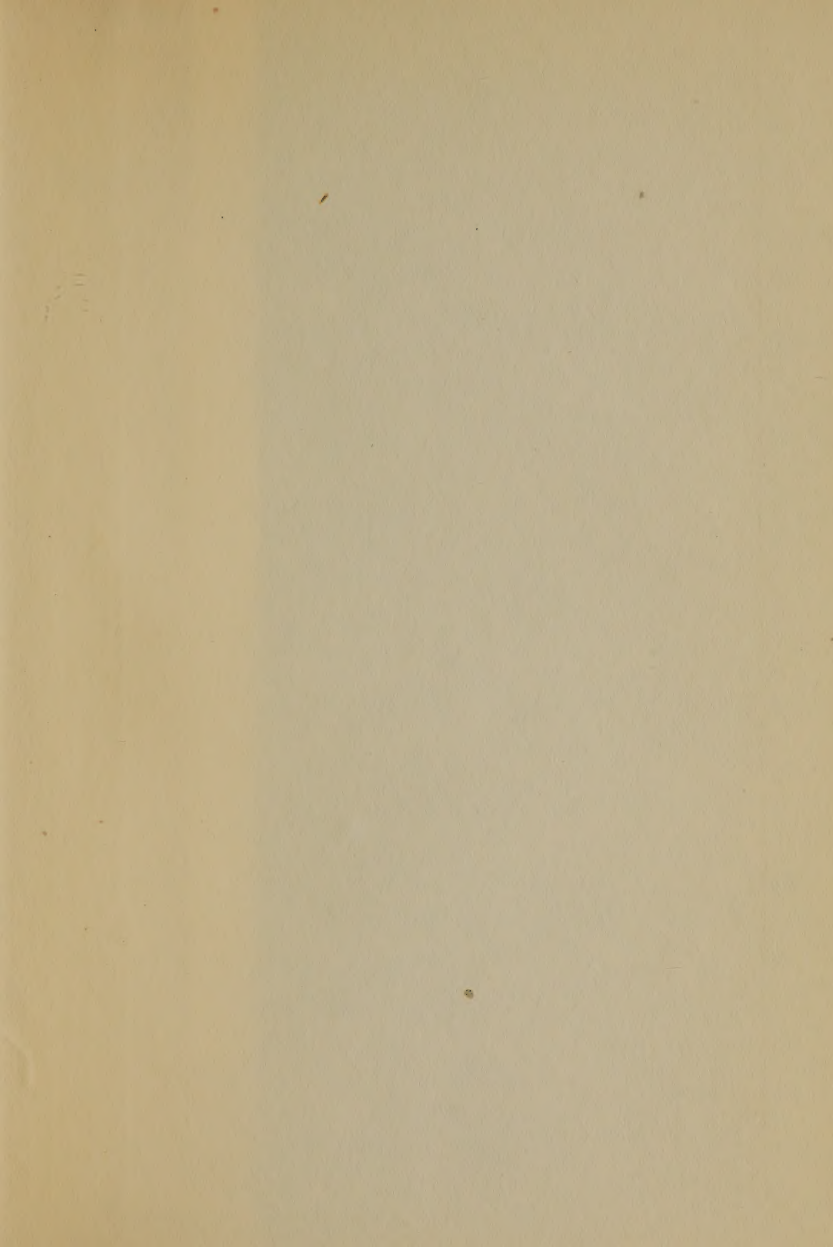
3RD LADY. Er— The car *must* be there by now !

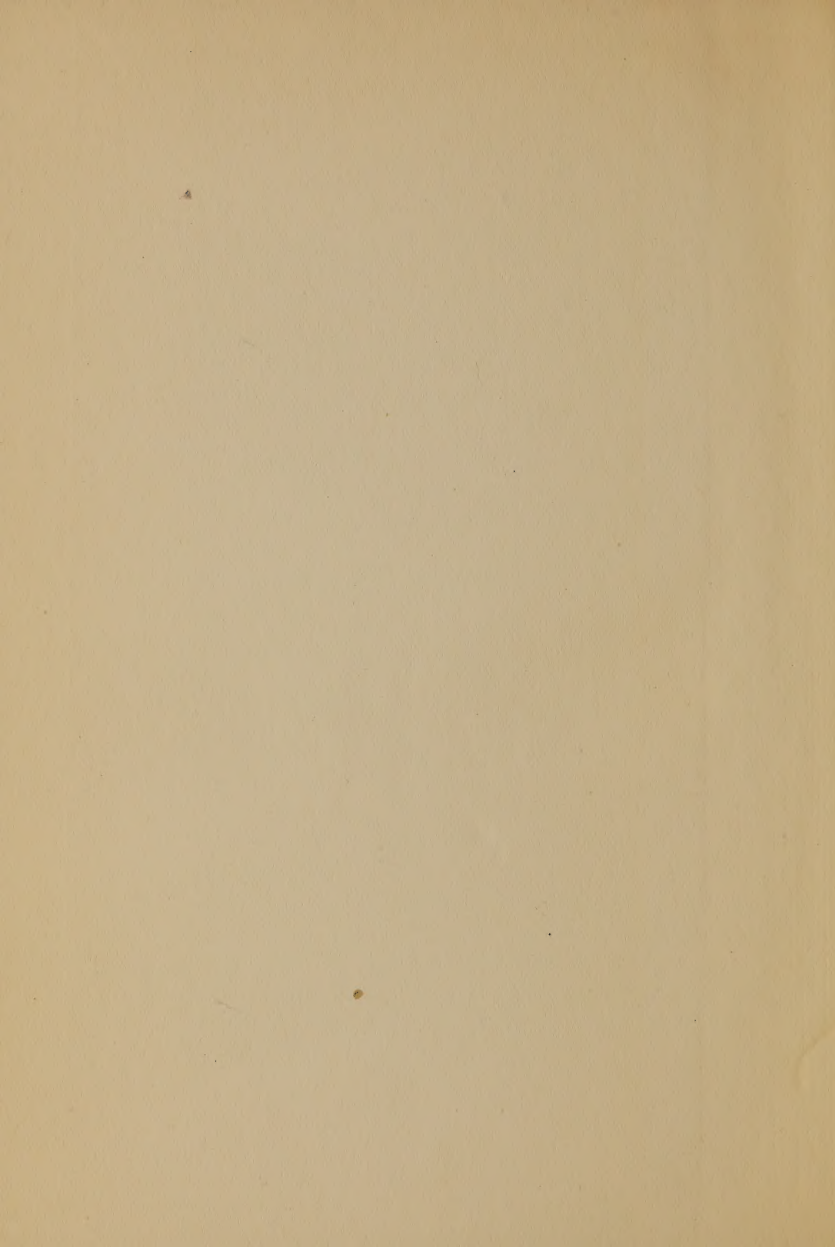
Like a bunch of frightened poultry they fluster through the doorway and are lost in the throng outside.

LADY M. [*To herself—very low*] The Show is over.

CURTAIN.

THE END.





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signature

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